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Short Stories

MAR. 25th

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Clinical Tests Showed Marked Improvement in 76% of Cases

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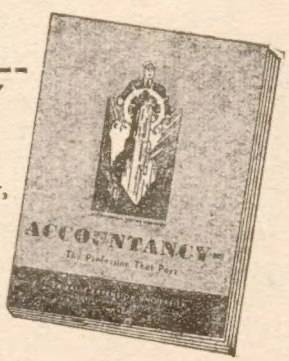

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COVER—Edward M. Stevenson

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SHORT STORIES
1890-1940

ON OUR shelves in the SHORT STORIES offices in Radio City are copies of the little old magazines that were the first numbers of a periodical which first appeared in 1890. "It is intended to entertain and not particularly to instruct," said an announcement in the first number, "while the lowest reading intelligence can rise to an understanding of its material, the highest will not find it uninteresting, commonplace or beneath appreciation." Well, that was fifty years ago and during all that time SHORT STORIES has kept to its main purpose—to entertain.

Consider for a minute the world of 1890; Benjamin Harrison was President of the United States, a country of 62,622,250 people; that year a gigantic skyscraper was completed in New York City—the World Building, 311 feet from curb to flagstaff (the Empire State Building is 1,265 feet tall); the bill admitting Wyoming to the Union was signed; Helgoland was ceded to Germany by England in settlement of certain claims in Africa; the first execution by electricity took place in the United States; the president of the Mormon Church published a decree forbidding plural marriages; the first parliament in Japan was opened; Sitting Bull, the Indian Chief was killed by soldiers in South Dakota.

Those were the days when the infant SHORT STORIES first appeared in circulation, and as it grew, literary giants indeed were represented in its pages. Looking back over them we find the names of Kipling, Conan Doyle, O. Henry, Gilbert Parker, Bret Harte, Mark Twain, W. W. Jacobs, Laura E. Richards, Gertrude Atherton, Ambrose Bierce, to name only a few; early stories by such divergent modern celebrities as Ray Stannard Baker and Ellen Glasgow were written especially for our pages. "The Cook's Victory" by a youngster of 19 who bore the name of H. L. Mencken, appeared in SHORT STORIES in 1900. In a recent letter Mr. Mencken says that the story was a by-product of his early reporting days on the Baltimore Morning *Herald,* when he covered a raid on an employment agency which specialized in shanghaiing men for the Chesapeake Bay oyster fleet.

The magazine somewhat in its present form began to emerge under the editorship of Harry Peyton Steger. "Bob Davis Recalls" something of Steger in a letter he wrote us about him. "Harry Peyton Steger" said Mr. Davis, "during his all too short life, set so fast a pace for editors of short fiction magazines to follow that before they knew it they had acquired a standard in technique and editorial quality which gave an extraordinary impetus to readin' even after Steger himself had passed from the stage. He

had the gift of intimacy with writers. He was inspirational, instinctively aware of the public demand, and at the same time he was a man of fine appreciation. Mortals of his type dominate generations."

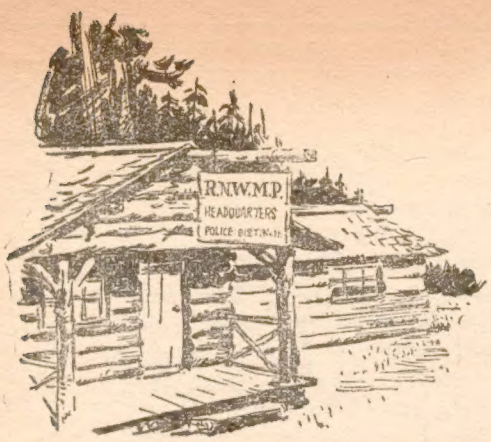
By Steger's time SHORT STORIES had been taken over by Doubleday, Page & Company, and when Steger died in 1912, Harry Maule became its editor, and continued to guide the policies of the magazine for many years. It is an interesting fact that for a time Margaret Porter, O. Henry's daughter, was its assistant editor, and in each issue there was an O. Henry story. Magazines were not so specialized at that time as they later became, and there were probably a tenth as many of them published as there are today. The general fiction magazine was lessening in appeal and magazines for more highly selective publics were taking its place. With its excellent author background, in SHORT STORIES a very definite editorial policy of red-blooded fiction was growing. Our appeal was to readers who wanted adventure and action and the thrill of far places; whose interest was in real characters functioning in situations and emergencies calling for resource and gallantry; who gloried in the exploits of the pioneers in our own West and on the frontiers of the world.

We evolved the idea of the big red sun on our covers as a distinguishing mark, and we take pride and satisfaction in the thought of the millions of readers to whom that cheerful sphere has meant a promise of good stories, well told by the best writers in their respective fields, men who know the value of accuracy of detail as well as of an enthralling plot.

And since nothing is constant but change, times have moved on, and under its present ownership SHORT STORIES has grown up with a new generation of readers. While other magazines have lowered prices, changed policies and turned some strange handsprings in a mad hunt for circulation, we feel that we have resisted those temptations and depended on reader-loyalty as the backbone of our progress.

In conclusion, a word about this present anniversary issue of SHORT STORIES. We wanted to make it as typical as possible of the magazine as a whole, we wanted to please as many of our multifarious readers as we could; so you'll find in it old friends such as Black John Smith and Hopalong Cassidy—Hopalong was the almost universal choice for a reprint of an old favorite; newer friends such as the Hawkins twins and Caffrey's airmen; and significant of the portentous days in which we live—a story of the present War. It's by a man who is living very close to it at the present time and who has had many yarns in SHORT STORIES in the past—Major Gilson. We are sorry that there isn't a Tuttle story in this number, but a perfectly grand one which introduces Hashknife to our friend Cultus Collins came along just too late to be included; it will appear soon in our pages. So —we leave with you this issue of your magazine, we hope you like it, and that you'll all be with us for the next fifty years of SHORT STORIES.

The Editor.



"What's the Police Got To Do With It?" Asked Red John. "We Handle Our Own Murders on Halfaday."

CORPORAL DOWNEY: "SUICIDE." BLACK JOHN: "MAYBE."

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of "A Siwash Uses His Judgment," "Evil Companions," etc.

I

AS Black John Smith entered the barroom of Cushing's Fort, the stalwart log outpost of civilization that served the requirements, spiritous and temporal, of the little community of outlawed men that had sprung up on Halfaday Creek close against the Yukon-Alaska boundary line; Old Cush, the proprietor, set out a bottle, two glasses, and a worn leather dice box.

"Where an' the hell you be'n fer the last week?" he asked, as the big man picked up the box, rattled the dice noisily, and rolled them out onto the bar.

"There's three fives in one. I'll leave 'em. I've be'n over on Willow Crick attendin' to some ecclesiastical matters."

"You mean some kind of prospectin'?" Cush asked, as he gathered the dice and shook them. "There's three big sixes to top them three little fives you left. An' here's right back at you with four sixes more."

"Three of which," growled Black John, "I mistrust was the ones you rolled out the other time. I can't prove it—but after this when you shake, you set that bottle off to one side so I kin see what yer doin' with them dice!"

"Looks like I done pretty good with 'em," Cush grinned, as he glanced at Black John's three deuces, made an entry in his day book, and reached for the bottle. "Willer Crick is a hell of a ways from here, an' it ain't nothin' but a moose pasture when you git there," he observed, "an' besides, I heard some Siwashes was plantin' gardens over there. It looks like anyone would have more sense than to prospect on it."

"Well, Bonanza wasn't nothin' but a moose pasture when Carmack made his strike. All the wise ones had passed it up. It took a squaw-man to find out what it was worth."

"Yeah—but there ain't no more Bon-

anzas. An' besides, you ain't no squaw-man, if there was. Onlest," he added, "that big word you used is some kind of a nick-name fer gittin' married."

"No, grinned Black John, "I didn't git married. I went over to call on a priest."

"I heard there was a priest over there. It was him got them Siwashes to plant them gardens. But I didn't know you was so religious you'd go sixty, seventy mile jest to call on a priest."

"I don't claim to be no more religious than the average husky dog," Black John replied. "My pa was a preacher, an' from what I could see, he worked damn hard at it with little er no visible results. So I sort of devoted my life to other pursuits."

"A little religion don't hurt no one, though," Cush opined. "My fourth wife was religious as hell—an' she had my first three ones beat a mile. Trouble is, outside of preachers an' wimmin, there ain't no one else got no time to monkey with it.

"I was off moose huntin' the day you pulled out. One Armed John claimed a Siwash come in here an' bought five, six ounces worth of supplies, an' you got to talkin' to him, an' then you ordered a hull canoeload of supplies, an' draw'd a hundred ounces out of the safe, an' went off with this Siwash. I figgered he'd put you wise to some crick an' you paid him the hundred ounces."

"IT WASN'T exactly that way," Black John explained. "The Siwash come in, jest as One Arm said, an' he bought a little grub, an' one cheap blanket, an' paid fer 'em with bills. I got to talkin' with him, an' he told me the stuff was fer Father Duchene. He's a damn fine old man. Most of the missionaries do more harm than good to the natives, what with makin' 'em change their ways of livin' to conform to the white man's notions. But not Father Duchene. He's one priest that's got sense enough to look after the physical needs of the natives before he worries about their hereafter. The Siwash told me things hadn't be'n goin' so good on Willow Crick. The gardens he good Father had 'em plant was comin' along fine till that cold spell we got a couple of weeks ago, when they froze black, right down to the ground.

"Trappin' had be'n pore last winter, an' the Siwashes didn't have no credit, an' they was mighty short of supplies to face the winter on—an' no chanct to better them-

selves till the Christmas tradin' time. There'd be'n sickness amongst 'em, an' Father Duchene had got a doctor up there durin' the summer, an' had used up the money the church sent him, payin' fer medicine an' what-not, till them few dollars was all he had left. He'd paid the doctor out of his own pocket because he knew that if he waited fer the Indian Department to git around to sendin' one it would be too late.

"I know the old Father likes his little nip, now an' then. An' I know he loves his pipe. But there wasn't a bottle on that Siwash'es list of supplies — nor a damn ounce of tobacco. So I loaded up the canoe with stuff—all it would hold. An' took a hundred ounces out of the safe, an' went over to Willow Crick with the Siwash, an' seen to it that the old priest got a few bottles of licker, an' some tobacco, an' enough grub to last him a while. I shore had to talk turkey to the old fella because he wanted to give out most of the stuff to the Siwashes. There's about forty of 'em, an' they'll need plenty more supplies to carry 'em on to the Christmas tradin'. I told Father Duchene to keep them hundred ounces fer an ace-in-the-hole, in case he run into more sickness, er somethin', an' made him promise to send three canoes over here fer more supplies. So when they come, you give 'em whatever the priest's list calls fer, an' charge it to me."

"I will like hell!" growled Cush.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean—who the hell do you think you be, hoggin' all the expense of them damn Siwashes? They'll git the supplies all right, but by God, I've got as much right to git in on this as you have!"

"Oh, all right!" replied Black John. "Have it yer own way. But, tell me, has anything portentious transpired in the haunts of the iniquitous?"

Cush scowled. "If that's somethin' you want to know, you better say it over. I wouldn't have no time to look up all them big words even if I had a dictionary, an' they prob'ly wouldn't mean nothin' if I did."

"I was merely inquirin' how things has be'n goin' on Halfaday."

"'Bout the same like always. Feller drifted in an' located in Whiskey Bill's old shack. Draw'd the name of Dan'l Hayne outa the name-can. Set in the stud game t'other night an' win him a few ounces."

"Yukon wanted?"

"He didn't say. He's a damn chechako. Mightn't be wanted nowheres. Might jest be prospectin', like he claims."

"If he ain't wanted, why should he draw a name out of the can? Did he claim his name was 'John Smith,' like all the rest?"

"No. He didn't claim it was nothin'. I was here alone when he come in, an' we had a couple of drinks, an' you know how chechakos is—like puppies, allus into everythin.' He seen the name-can settin' there on the end of the bar an' he looked in it an' seen them slips an' wanted to know what they was. An' when I told him, he draw'd one out an' claimed he'd use it instead of his own, which he claimed didn't make no different to no one, nohow."

Black John glanced toward the open doorway through which streamed the golden sunlight of late autumn. "Look who's comin'," he said. "I predict we'll presently hear news of sorts. When One Arm picks 'em up an' lays 'em down like that, he's got some information to onload."

II

ONE ARMED JOHN burst into the room as Cush spun a glass across the bar. "There's a feller," he gasped, as he

reached for the bottle, "in Olson's old shack!"

"Well," grinned Black John, "s'pose there is? What does he look like?"

"He looks dead as hell, to me."

"Dead!"

Old Cush glowered. "Damn if you ain't the worst corpse hound in the Yukon—bar none! But why an' the hell do you allus have to be findin' 'em on Halfaday? Cripes—the country's full of other cricks!"

"Well—hell—Cush, Halfaday's where I'm at. An' it's where the corpses is at. So I got to find 'em here. A corpse ain't no different than anythin' else—you got to find it where it's at."

"The statement savors of sound reasonin'," Black John grinned. "But tell us more about it."

"There ain't no more to tell. I come past there fishin', an' I seen how the door stud open a little, an' I went over to shet it so the rain er snow wouldn't pile inside, an' there he laid spraddled out on his back on the floor. I give the door a yank an' got to hell outa there as fast as I could leg it. Fishin' ain't no fun if you've got to keep runnin' onto dead folks. I wisht someone would die sometime where I wouldn't have to find him!"

"Me an' you both," agreed Cush. "Did he look prosperous?"

"I don't know how he looked! Jest like I said—I seen him, an' run."

"A mercenary attitude in a public official is deplorable," grinned Black John. "As coroner, Cush, it's your duty to hold an' inquest to determine the manner of his death, be he prince er pauper."

"Oh, shore. I was jest wonderin'. It ain't nothin' agin a man if he'd like to turn a profit, now an' then. Anyways, it's a nice day fer an inquest, an' the ground ain't froze yet, an' he's bound to be middlin' fresh, what with the cold nights. I swung around that way huntin' only three, four days ago, an' there wasn't no one in Olson's shack, then."

"We might's well go on down," Black John said. "You kin leave One Arm to tend bar."

A JURY was drafted on the way from among those citizens of Halfaday whose claims lay down the creek from the Fort. The big man, together with Cush, and the five others who made up the jury, filed into the little cabin and stood looking solemnly down at the corpse.

"Cush, as coroner, pronounces this man dead," Black John announced. "An' it now devolves upon us, as the jury, to try an' determine the cause of death."

"That ain't goin' to be no hell of a chore," opined Pot Gutted John, pointing to the .38 calibre nickel-plated revolver lying on the floor close beside the man's outstretched hand. "You kin see the powder burns on his skin where he helt the gun practically agin' his right temple."

"Don't no one touch that gun!" Black John ordered. "This looks like a suicide. But it might be a murder. An' if it is, it might be that the one that done it left his fingerprints on the butt, er the trigger, er somewheres."

"How the hell could you tell whose they was, if he did?" asked Long Nosed John.

"This here fingerprint stuff is a lot of damn nonsense," opined Short John, as he watched the big man pick the gun up by the barrel and carefully wrap it in an old newspaper.

"Yeah?" retorted Black John. "Well, it might be comfortin' fer you to know that that same opinion has be'n expressed by several gents right up to the time they was hung—fer leavin' their fingerprints around where the police could git holt of 'em."

"What's the police got to do with it?" questioned Red John. "We handle our own murders on Halfaday."

"Prob'ly nothin'," the big man admitted. "But I'm keepin' the gun as it is—jest in case." He paused and allowed his glance to travel searchingly about the room. "I don't see nothin' that would indicate that anyone besides the dead man has be'n in here.

The stuff shows a one-man outfit. An' it looks like he ain't be'n here long." He paused, his eyes centering on the dead man. "I don't s'pose any of you ever seen him before?"

ALL denied ever having seen the man, and Black John stooped and began methodically to remove the contents of the pockets—a long-bladed clasp knife, a pipe and tobacco pouch, a blue bandanna handkerchief with two holes cut near the center, about an inch and a half apart, a gold hunting case watch attached to a heavy gold chain bearing a Masonic emblem, and a leather wallet containing two ten dollar bills in United States money. The wallet was removed from the hip pocket of the man's trousers, and the bills were stained by the leather for about one-third of their length, as though he had waded in water, wetting the lower end of the wallet, which also contained a pencilled note. Placing the collection on the table, Black John stepped to the doorway and, holding the paper to the light, began to read it carefully. When he had finished, he glanced at Red John.

"You was askin' a few minutes ago what the police had to do with this case," he said. "Well, I'm bettin' it'll be plenty. I'm predictin' that Corporal Downey'll be showin' up here before very long. An' after he goes back it might be that we'll have a chore of our own to do."

"What do you mean—a chore of our own?" Cush asked sourly. "Ain't it enough we should come clean down here to set on this corpse, an' not enough on him to pay fer three rounds of drinks?"

"Accordin' to this, he had plenty on him when he come here. He claims his cache was robbed."

"Robbed!" exclaimed Pot Gutted John. "How much does he claim he had in it?"

"He says here it was twenty-five hundred ounces."

"Twenty-five hundred!" cried Red John. "My God, that's forty-thousan' dollars! An' him a chechako! It don't sound reasonable. Where does he say he got it?"

"He says here that on September the tenth he laid fer the manager of the Detroit-Yukon outfit an' a packer comin' down the Klondike trail with the clean-up an' he shot 'em both with his revolver, an' packed the dust to the Yukon, an' loaded it in his canoe an' hit fer Halfaday. He says he got here on the twenty-third, an' cached his dust an' throw'd his stuff into this shack. On the mornin' of the twenty-fourth he claims he went to his cache to git some dust to go on up to Cush's an' buy some supplies an' he found the cache empty. He says he ain't only got twenty dollars left, which ain't enough to buy supplies that would take him anywheres, an' he wouldn't know where to go if he had the supplies. He says he's afraid to go back to the Yukon an' face a hangin', so he's takin' the only way out. He asks whoever finds his body to send the watch an' chain to the manager's wife, as her picture is pasted in the back. An' he winds up by sayin', 'So long, world—to hell with you! Here goes nothin'!' That's all. There ain't no name signed to it."

Cush shrugged. "Well," he said, "I guess that finishes the case. What'll we do, John—go ahead an' bury him? Er leave him here fer Downey to see?"

"We better take him up an' bury him in the graveyard. It might be quite a while before Downey gits here. We'll take all this other stuff along, too. We won't sink him very deep, in case Downey would want to dig him up."

"That'll give us a new kind of a check letter on his slab," Cush said. "We've got D's fer died natural, an' H's fer hung, an' M's fer murdered. But we ain't never had no suicides before. At that, a S is so damn crooked it'll be hard to make. But I wonder who in hell robbed his cache?"

"That," replied Black John, a grim set to his lips, "is what I meant a while back, when I said we might have a chore of our own to do."

III

ONE blustering day of alternating sunshine and snow squalls, some three weeks after the inquest, Corporal Downey stepped into the barroom at Cushing's Fort to find Black John and Cush facing each other across the bar, the inevitable dice box between them.

"Hell of a day fer anyone to be out," greeted the big man, as Cush slid a glass across the bar and shoved the bottle. "What you doin'—huntin' moose, er probin' into the machinations of the sinful?"

"I'm huntin' a murderer," replied the officer, as he poured his drink. "A bird knocked off a packer for the Detroit-Yukon outfit, an' shot the manager in the head. When I left Dawson ten days ago the doctors at the hospital give him about a twenty-five percent chance of pullin' through."

"H-m-m. Was the venture successful, from a financial standp'int?"

"He got away with twenty-five hundred ounces."

"He did, eh? You got any specifications on him? Er are you goin' it blind?"

"The manager regained consciousness several times an' he was able to give a sort of description of the robber. Said he looked like a chechako. Stood about six foot, and would weigh around a hundred an' seventy-five er eighty. Said he had his face masked with a blue bandanna with white dots an' a couple of eye-holes cut in it. He used a nickel-plated revolver. That's about all we could get out of him. He only stayed conscious a few minutes at a time."

Black John nodded approval. "He done pretty well, as fer as the description goes."

"You mean the man's here—on Halfaday?"

"Yeah, he's here."

"Where 'bouts?"

"Out back. We didn't plant him only about two foot deep, figurin' you'd be along an' might want to look him over."

"You mean he's dead?"

"That's what Cush claimed, an' he's the coroner. We took his word fer it an' buried the man. He's in that new grave, this way from the others. It's the one with the S fer a check letter. Cush got the letter headed the wrong way—but so was the fella—so I guess it's O. K."

"What do you mean 'S'?" asked Downey. "An' howcome he's dead?"

"The word 'suicide' answers both questions."

"You mean, he killed himself?"

"That's what it looks like. An' that's what he claimed in his note." He turned to Cush. "Hand out that package of junk we fetched up with the corpse, an' Downey kin see fer himself."

The officer read the note through twice and looked up with a frown. "Who robbed his cache?" he asked abruptly.

Black John shrugged. "If we knew the answer to that one there'd be a new H grave alongside of his."

Downey pried open the back of the watch and glanced at the photograph. "That's her," he said, "the manager's wife. She'll prob'ly be glad to get this back. An' the D-Y outfit would be damn glad to git their twenty-five hundred ounces back, too."

"Who the hell wouldn't!" remarked Black John. "I'm glad it's them an' not me that's got to worry about it."

"You never did worry very much over any big outfit's loss."

"Well, I ain't begun to git gray over 'em."

"I see you wrapped the gun up separate. Did anyone handle it?"

The big man shook his head. "Nope. One Armed John found the corpse. He was fishin' along there an' seen the door of Olson's old shack was open, so he went to close it, an' when he seen the body sprawled out on the floor he pulled the door shet an' legged it fer here an' told me an' Cush about it. So we gathered a coroner's jury an' went down an' set on the case. I picked up the gun by the barrel an' wrapped it up in that paper, an' it's be'n here ever sence.

I figgered you'd want to look it over for fingerprints."

"That's right," Downey approved. Unwrapping the gun, he picked it up by the barrel, turning it this way and that to catch the light. "An' it looks like we might get some, too. He examined the other objects, one by one, and returned them to the package. "We'll go out, now, an' dig up the body. I want to photograph it an' git his

fingerprints fer the file. It might be we can get plain enough prints off the gun to compare 'em here an' find out if it was him that handled it last. If not I'll have to wait till I get to Dawson where we've got better equipment."

THE body was disinterred, photographed and its fingerprints taken. Stepping into the saloon, Downey dusted some fine powder onto the butt, trigger, and trigger-guard, and with a pocket magnifying glass compared them with the dead man's prints. "I'm almost positive they're his prints," he announced, after several moments of close scrutiny. "I make out some islands an' whorls that seem to jibe, all right. I can't tell for sure till I get back to detachment."

"I s'pose we kin go ahead an' rebury him, then," Black John said.

Downey shook his head. "Not yet. Even if I can prove that he was the last man to handle this gun, an' that his finger was the last finger to pull that trigger, an' that the gun was held close enough to his head to leave powder marks on his skin—that don't prove that it was this gun that killed him. He might have fired a shot at someone else, an' someone else might have held some other gun to his head an' knocked him off."

"It could be that way," Black John admitted, "but it ain't likely."

"No, it ain't likely. But in police work a man wants to be sure. The bullet that killed him is still inside his skull. I'll borrow a hand-saw from Cush an' get that bullet, an' compare it with a bullet fired from this gun. If they match up, I guess the case will be closed—except fer recoverin' them twenty-five hundred ounces. The D-Y's sure goin' to put up a squawk."

"Well, a good squawk won't hurt 'em none. We'll keep our eyes open fer the one that robbed that cache, an' if we find him he'll meet up with what the newspapers call 'sumnary justice'—you kin bet yer last stack of blue ones on that."

"An' the twenty-five hundred ounces—I s'pose you'll turn them over to me, when you find 'em?"

"I wouldn't like to make no rash promises till I find 'em," Black John replied gravely. "Ounces like them is apt to be damn hard to locate. 'Specially when the one that's got 'em knows they've already be'n stole out of one cache. He's likely to hide 'em pretty good."

"But," persisted the officer, "you'll return 'em if you do locate 'em?"

"Hell, Downey, what you quibblin' about? Cripes sake! We returned that watch, didn't we? An' them two ten dollar bills? If we'd wanted to be onderhanded we could of held 'em out on you an' claimed there worn't no sech items in his inventory. It shore pains me to feel that you'd entertain even a breath of suspicion agin my integrity."

"Well," Downey replied dryly, "jest to keep the pain from gittin' too bad fer you to stand, I'll buy a drink. An' then I'll be hittin' back. If I hurry, an' have good luck, I can make it back to Dawson before the freeze-up."

IV

A FEW days later, as Black John stepped into the saloon, Cush addressed a tall, well set-up newcomer who faced him across the bar.

"You was askin' about Black John—there he is. I'll make you acquainted with him." As the big man took his place beside the other, Cush said, "John, this here's Dan Hayne. He's the fella I was tellin' you about that's located up on Whiskey Bill's old claim."

There was a look of frank admiration in Hayne's eyes as he extended his hand. "I'm sure glad to meet up with you," he said. "I've heard quite a bit about you, here an' there. Have a drink?"

The big man shook the proffered hand. "Yeah, I take an occasional drink, jest by way of passin' the time."

"I be'n tellin' Dan about that fella that shot hisself down in Olson's shack," Cush said, as he set out the bottle and glasses.

"Yeah—the damn cuss!" Hayne exclaimed. "Knockin' them two fellas off the way he done. Served him damn good an' right that someone stole that dust on him. It's too bad the law couldn't of hung him, though—fer a kind of a sample of what happens to folks that carries on like that. Cush tells me the case is closed, an' this Corporal Downey has went back to Dawson."

"Yeah, the case is closed all right, as fer as the law's concerned."

"It's funny he wouldn't of stuck around a while an' tried to locate that dust."

"It wouldn't of done him no good," Black John explained. "On Halfaday we don't never hinder the police, but likewise, we don't never help 'em, neither. Downey ain't no fool. He knows that if he hung around here, the one that had the dust would slip acrost the line with it—an' he couldn't do a damn thing about it. How you doin' on Whiskey Bill's claim?"

"Not bad. I'm takin' out a lot of dust there. I figger if I work it all winter I'd ort to have right around forty er fifty thousan' dollars in dust, come spring."

"You do, eh? Well, when a man kin do that good he'd be a fool not to stay with it."

"That's what I claim." The three emptied their glasses, and Hayne drew a paper from his pocket and laid it on the bar. "I made me a list of stuff I've got to git. I ain't got no dog outfit, an' I figger I'd better lay in my winter's supplies while I kin pole 'em up the crick in my canoe. The still places'll be freezin' over one of these nights, an' then I'd have to back-pack 'em."

Glancing down at the paper, Black John's eyes narrowed, slightly. "That's right," he agreed. "Fill up. We'll have another, an' then I'll git the stuff out fer you so Cush kin be gittin' on with his bar chores."

As the three filled their glasses Cush frowned across the bar. "Cripes—here it's ten o'clock in the mornin'! The bar chores has—"

"Shore, I know!" Black John interrupted hurriedly. "The bar chores has be'n kind of botherin' you, hangin' along like they are. But I'll git this stuff out myself so you kin git at 'em. That back bar looks like hell, the way it's messed up. An' the floor don't look like it's be'n swep' fer a week. If you git slip-shod, Cush, you'll begin losin' trade."

CATCHING the big man's eye, Cush curbed an acid retort and even managed a mumbled thanks for the proffered assistance. The drinks were had, and Black John headed for the storeroom.

"Fetch yer list along, Dan," he called, "an' we'll be gittin' at it!"

Behind the bar Cush eyed the two with a puzzled frown, and as they disappeared through the storeroom doorway he took a month-old newspaper from the back bar, spread it out upon the bar, adjusted his square, steel-rimmed spectacles, and proceeded to laboriously devour its contents. An hour later, as the two returned to the barroom, he folded the paper and set out the bottle and glasses.

Black John cast an approving glance about the room. "Got through, eh? Looks about a hundred percent better in here. You ort to keep it lookin' like this all the

time, Cush. A little extry work, now an' then, would do the trick. Folks likes to do their drinkin' where it's tidy. I got Dan all fixed up. I've got the list here. It figgers up to six hundred an' twenty-four dollars."

Cush made a pencilled calculation as Hayne tossed a pouch onto the bar. "It figgers jest thirty-nine ounces," he announced, picking up the pouch and shaking the dust onto the scale. He emptied the pouch and peered at the scale. "You ain't only got thirty-one ounces here," he said.

Hayne laughed. "Hell, that's all right! There's plenty more where that come from. I kin pay you now," he offered, producing a wallet from his pocket and drawing some bills from it, "er if you'd ruther have it in dust, I kin leave part of the stuff here an' come back fer it when I fetch down the dust. I never thought about not havin' enough in the poke."

"Put up yer wallet," Black John advised. "Cush, he don't like to take in bills when he kin git dust. You kin take the stuff along with you an' fetch the dust down later."

"All right. But there's a little more'n that owin'. It's fer them two boxes of .30-40 ca'tridges. There wasn't no price mark on 'em, an' you didn't know how much they was."

"That's so," the big man agreed, consulting the list. "It's a good thing Dan's honest, Cush, eh you'd of got beat out of them shells."

"I figger honesty pays a man, in the long run," Hayne said. Then, with a quick glance of apology toward Black John. "Not meanin' no slurs agin you! I heard how you held up an army er somethin', somewheres over in Alasky. What I claim—that takes guts!"

"No offense," reassured the big man. "The incident has ondoubtless be'n greatly exaggerated. Anyhow, I always regarded the event as more of a sportin' proposition than a dishonest transaction. Drink up, an' I'll buy one."

"I've got to figger on layin' me in some meat," Hayne said, as he filled his glass and shoved the bottle. "I ain't never hunted no moose. Use' to hunt deer, back in Michigan. But I s'pose moose huntin' is different."

"Yeah, it's a lot different than deer huntin'," Black John said. "Fact is, moose huntin's a kind of particular business. Take deer, now—if a man's got a rifle an' sort of pokes around in the woods where the deer is, an' kind of keeps an eye on the runways, he's damn near shore to git one. But a man could hunt moose fer a month, right where they was thick, an' never see one, if he didn't know how to go at it."

"There's plenty of moose around here, ain't there? I seen some tracks when I was comin' down."

"There used to be," Black John explained, "but lately they're gittin' kind of scarse. It's got so a man's got to go quite a ways back to git him a good one. Of course, he could knock off an old bull, er a lean, leggy cow right here on Halfaday. But chances is he couldn't eat the meat after he got it. Young stuff—two an' three year olds is what a man wants. I've be'n figgerin' on layin' in my winter's meat, myself. This snow we got last night is all right fer trackin', an' it's good enough fer the sled, with a light load. I know a place, quite a piece back from here, where there's a lot of young moose hangin' out. I'll be pullin' out tomorrow mornin', an' you kin go along, if you'd like. We'll take a couple of weeks' grub along an' kill plenty of meat fer both of us."

"That would be fine!" Hayne exclaimed. "It's damn good of you to take me along. I'll be glad to furnish the grub fer the trip, if you'll furnish the sled an' the dogs, an' show me about the huntin'."

"We'll go fifty-fifty on the grub," Black John replied. "You better git this stuff up to yer shack now, an' then come on back an' fetch yer rifle an bed-roll along. You kin sleep in my extry bunk tonight, an'

we'll git an early start in the mornin'. You kin take all the stuff up with you—like I said, Cush'll trust you fer them other nine ounces."

Cush nodded assent. "Shore, take it along. An' you better git goin if you figger on gittin' back here 'fore dark. It's quite a piece up to Whiskey Bill's."

Black John obligingly helped the man carry his supplies to the creek and load them into the canoe. As the other stepped into the craft, the big man pointed to his hip pocket. "I see you've got a pistol in there. Are you any good with it?"

The man looked a trifle startled. "Well—not so bad, I guess. Why?"

Black John grinned. "Nothin', except that if you kin hit anything with it, it would be a damn good thing to have along on the moose hunt. We'll be runnin' onto a lot of Ptarmagin on the trail, an' if we had a light gun to knock 'em off with, we'd save rifle ammunition an' not waste no meat."

"How's this?" laughed the man, and picking up an empty tin from the bank, tossed it into the water and drilled it twice before it sank as it drifted past.

Black John voiced approval. "I'll say you ain't so bad! Fetch it along. Them Ptarmagin's damn good eatin'."

WHEN he returned to the barroom Cush regarded him with a frown. "Seems like yer gittin' damn thick with chechakos all of a sudden," he growled, as he filled his glass and shoved the bottle across the bar.

"Oh, Dan seems like an up-an-comin' young fella."

"Huh—what's so damn up-an'-comin' about some chechako which he ain't got no more brains in his head than to figger he could take forty, fifty thousan' dollars out of Whiskey Bill's old claim in one winter?"

"Well—he's a trifle optimistic, mebbe. But it shouldn't take a man so long to pan out forty, fifty thousan' if he's spry."

"You talk like a damn fool!" Cush growled. "An' besides, what was the idee in you claimin' I didn't have my bar chores done?

"An, waitin' on him yerself, an' then claimin' the place here looked a hundred precent better, when I never done nothin' to it whilst you was in the storeroom but read in that paper? An' you claimin' I'd ruther take in dust than bills? An' then claimin' there worn't no moose on Half-aday except old an' pore ones, an' offerin' to take him off to hell an' gone on a two weeks' huntin' trip. You know damn well you could git any kind of a moose you want right here, in a day's hunt."

"Answerin' all them queries to onct," grinned the big man, "I will state that assumin' the population of New York City to be rapidly approachin' the four million mark, taken together with the fact that scientists have calculated the distance between here an' the sun to be somethin' over ninety-two million miles, as the crow flies, might have some bearin' on the subject—but I doubt it. I'll be biddin' you adieu, for the nonce, as a poet would say. I have a certain matter to attend to."

"Huh—an' if Downey was here I'd shore as hell loan him that hand-saw agin, so he could lift off the top of yer head an' find out what's wrong in there! I s'pose this here matter you've got to 'tend to ain't got nothin' to do with you knowin' Dan Hayne has got to go to his cache to git out some dust?"

"I detect, in the tone of your voice, a ring of irony which should nettle me. However, as the supposition is your own, you may have it for what it's worth. I'm wastin' time here, I'll be seein' you later."

Hayne returned just on the edge of darkness, and a few minutes later Black John entered the saloon, yawning prodigiously.

"Back already, eh? I had me a good nap. Come on over to my cabin an' we'll eat supper, an' then come back an' set in the stud game fer a while. We want to git an early start in the mornin', so we won't play very late."

ONE evening, after five days of steady traveling toward the northeast, Black John halted on the bank of a frozen river. "We'll camp here," he said. "Last time I was here the moose was good an' thick. An' there's plenty of sign around."

"Seems to me we've be'n seein' a lot of tracks ever sence we started," Hayne said as he helped remove the outfit from the sled.

"Oh, shore, there's be'n plenty of tracks. But you must of noticed they was all big ones. Them old moose travels further'n what the young ones do. That's what makes 'em tough. When a man tries to eat one it's like chawin' a chunk of rubber."

"Seems like a hell of a ways to come fer meat, though."

"It's kind of far, all right," Black John admitted, "but what's a few miles, if a man gits the kind of stuff he wants?"

"Oh, I don't mind it! Fact is, there ain't be'n a day but what I've learnt somethin' about winter travelin'. An' now I'll learn about moose huntin'."

"That's right. In the mornin' you hit out along the river, an' I'll swing inland, an' that way we'll keep 'em between us, an' one of us'll be bound to git a shot."

On the afternoon of the second day, with three moose down, Black John said, "That's about all the meat we kin handle. I'll slip upriver to that Siwash village an' git 'em to help us haul it in. I figger it'll take five more sleds."

The cutting up and loading of the meat took all the next day, and the following morning the six sleds pulled out, following down the river. On the third day thereafter they pulled out onto a broad expanse of snow covered ice.

"Why—what's this?" cried Hayne, in evident surprise. "It—it looks like the Yukon!"

Black John grinned. "That's prob'ly because it is the Yukon. It's a damn sight easier haulin' the stuff down the Sixty-mile, like we done, an' up the Yukon to the White, an' up that to Halfaday, than it would of be'n to haul it cross country through them damn mountains. Besides that, we've got more meat than we need. Them was all big three year olds we got, an' they dressed out right around a thousan' pounds apiece. We don't need more'n a thousan' pound between us, an' that leaves us a ton to sell."

"Sell? Where?"

"Dawson, of course! When Downey was up on that D-Y murder case he told me moose was scarce this fall along the river, an' meat was fetchin' a dollar a pound. So what's the matter with me an' you sendin' two of these sleds on up to Cush's, an' slippin' the other four down to Dawson? There's anyways a couple of thousan' dollars in it fer us—plenty to finance a damn good bust. I sort of feel a jamboree comin' on. It's be'n a hell of a while sence I've flung them gals around a dance hall floor, an' took a whirl at a wheel, an' had an all-around, bang-up good time. We've got a long winter ahead of us. Cush's is all right, fer as it goes, but a man gits tired of it after a while. He likes to git out an' see the sights. An' besides, Downey was tellin' me there was a lot of new gals come in on the last boat. It looks like we'd ort to go down an' kind of look 'em over." As he talked, he noted that the other showed increasing interest, especially at mention of the girls.

"Well," Hayne said, after a few moments of hesitation, "it is kind of lone-

some up there on Halfaday. We could do it all up in a few days."

"Shore we could!" Black John agreed. "I wouldn't figger on stayin' no more'n three er four days at the outside. I ain't no hand to let frivolity interfere with business."

"All right—let's go!"

Two days later the outfit pulled into Dawson. Black John disposed of the meat, handing Haynes a thousand dollars for his share.

After a few drinks together in the Tivoli, Hayne headed for Cuter Malone's notorious Klondike Palace, where Black John looked in a couple of hours later to find him hilariously drunk, whooping it up with the dance hall girls. Then he headed for the detachment headquarters of the Northwest Mounted Police.

V

CORPORAL DOWNEY looked up from his desk as the big man stepped into the office. "Hello, John!" he greeted. "Did you ever find the bird that robbed that cache?"

"Not yet, I ain't."

"Pshaw! I was hopin' you'd step up here an' plunk them twenty-five hundred ounces down on the desk."

"You was, eh? Well, hopin' don't hurt a man none. "An' it's about the only pastime there is that don't cost money."

"The D-Y outfit has be'n raisin' hell about that dust."

"They have, eh? Well, well! Take me, I can't seem to work up no agony over their loss. If it was some private prospector I might mourn a bit—but not fer no corporation."

"It's a cinch someone on Halfaday got it."

"D'you reckon?"

"Sure! The fella cached it there, an' it was lifted."

"What fella?"

"Why, the suicide, of course!"

"Oh, him. Hell, I don't believe he ever had a cache."

"Never had a cache! Then why would he kill himself?"

"He wouldn't."

"What! What do you mean? That was as clear a case of suicide as I ever seen!"

"Yeah? Well, how many suicides have you ever seen?"

"Not very many," Downey admitted "But there ain't a chance in a thousan' that wasn't one. When I got back here I checked his fingerprints with those on the gun, an' they matched to a T. An' the bullet I took out of his head was fired from that gun. Then I showed the photograph I took of him to a lot of folks here in Dawson an' learnt that he was a chechako by the name of Jack Lewis. When his claim on Squaw Crick petered out, he done odd jobs here an' there, an' hung out mostly around Cuter Malone's. He got to drinkin' pretty heavy, an' several times he pawned his revolver—that nickel-plated one—fer a few dollars. But he always paid up the loan an' got it back.

"One night there was a stick-up right here on Front Street. A chechako was stood up at the point of a nickel-plated gun an' robbed of a hundred an' fifty dollars in United States bills, an' six ounces of dust. He reported it an' said the robber had his face masked with a blue bandanna with white dots on it, an' that he stood about six foot, an' was well set-up. I put a rooky constable on the case, an' mebbe he give his hand away an' scairt the fella out of town—because the next day the D-Y job was pulled off on the Klondike trail. An' the description the manager gave of the robber checked exactly with the description of the Front Street robber. This Lewis had be'n goin' from bad to worse, an' when he come to the end of his rope, he shot himself."

"Kind of looks like that, don't it? That's what Cush thought, an' the jury, too—an' they didn't have as much to go on as you

have. But it's like I always claim, Downey —folks hadn't ort to jump at conclusions."

"Jump at conclusions! Good God, John —with all that evidence you couldn't call this case, 'jumpin' at conclusions'!"

"No? Well, let's kind of run over the facts. In the first place, where in hell would a chechako git forty thousan' dollars to cache?"

Downey looked astounded. "Are you drunk, er crazy?"

"Nope," grinned the other, "an' if I was, I wouldn't incriminate myself by admittin' it."

"Why—he got it out of the D-Y robbery, of course! His own confession shows that. It detailed the crime exactly. He had the manager's watch in his possession. An' he tallied to a hair with the manager's description of the robber, blue bandanna an' all. An' it's a double murder, now. The manager died the day before I got back to Dawson."

"Too bad. The damn skunk that done it ort to be hung."

"Hung! Hell, he's dead!"

"Dead, eh?"

Downey scowled; then grinned. "I don't know what you're stringin' me along fer, John. But if he ain't dead he damn well ort to be. I sawed his head in two goin' after that bullet."

"Oh—you mean that fella! So you figger he's the one that done it, eh?"

"Hell—no!" Downey exploded in wrathful irony. "It couldn't have be'n him; I've jest got through provin' to you why it couldn't! He never robbed anyone! He is not even dead! That shot he fired at himself in Olson's old shack missed him a mile! An' that hand-saw I used never even gave him a headache! I closed the case jest because I like to see a murderer have a good time! He's right now down in Cuter Malone's celebratin'!"

"Well," grinned Black John, "you got that part right, anyhow—even if yer argument ain't quite logical."

Downey subjected the big man to several moments of searching scrutiny. Then he shrugged. "I quit," he said, with an air of resignation. "Out with it! You've got somethin' on yer chest. Spill it!"

"YOU claim you've got this case closed. There ain't no law agin reopenin' it, is there?"

"Of course not! I thought it was closed —all but the recovery of them twenty-five hundred ounces."

"We kin fergit about them ounces. This here's a murder case. Them ounces is incidental an' trivial. Now when you close a case, you still keep yer file of the evidence, don't you? Like the note the fella had in his pocket, an' his wallet with them stained bills in it, an' the gun, an' the bullet you dug out of his head?"

"Yes, that's all right here." The officer stepped to a cabinet, returned with a packet done up in heavy brown paper, and untied the string.

Black John tossed a crumpled piece of paper onto the desk. "See anything peculiar about that?" he asked.

Downey scrutinized the paper for a mo-

ment, then extracted the suicide note from the packet, and placed it beside the other. "It's the same handwritin'," he said.

"That's right. An' not only that, the word 'cartridge' is spelt 'caterige' in each one."

"The murderer wrote 'em both, all right. But what's that got to do with the case? This is prob'ly a list of supplies he'd made out to git the first time he went up to Cush's."

"Yeah, that's the way I figger it—the murderer wrote 'em both. An' the only thing it's got to do with the case is that the list of supplies was wrote about ten days ago."

"What!" cried Downey, half-rising from his chair, his eyes on the other's face.

"Yeah. There's a couple of more things, too, that sort of casts a doubt on yer deductions. Fer instance, the fellow that wrote it is packin' around a few ten dollar bills that's stained jest like them bills in the wallet, there. I seen 'em when he pulled 'em out up to Cush's. That sort of ties him in with Olson's old shack and the dead man you say was a suicide. On top of that, he's packin' a revolver—an' he's a damn good shot with it. Did you git the bullets that killed the D-Y packer an' the manager?"

Downey shook his head. "No. The packer was shot through the heart, an' the bullet went on through him. The doctors didn't dare to operate on the manager to remove the bullet from his head. An' by the time I got back here I thought I had the case cleared up anyway. So I never give no thought to the bullet."

"Kind of slip-shod, ain't you—fer an up an' comin' young policeman?" grinned the big man.

Downey shrugged. "Go ahead—rub it in. I've got it comin'. It sure looks like I fell down hard on this case."

"I was only kiddin'," Black John hastened to say. "Hell, anyone else would of thought the same thing. If ever a case looked like it was all sewed up in the bag, this one did. But—kin you git that bullet?"

"Sure I can! I'll get in touch with the doctors, an' get permission from the manager's widow to open the grave. I'll have the bullet within a few hours."

"Okay. I'll be down to the Tivoli tryin' to teach Bettles, an' Swiftwater Bill an' Moosehide Charlie some of the rudiments of stud."

Slipping into the Klondike Palace to make sure that Hayne was still there, Black John proceeded to the Tivoli and was soon deep in a stud game from which Corporal Downey summoned him shortly after midnight.

"I've got the bullet," the officer said, as they reached the sidewalk.

"A thirty-two, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"All right. The gun you found in Olson's shack was a thirty-eight. Yer man's down to the Klondike Palace. He's got the gun on him that killed that manager. You better go git him. An' watch yer step—he's a good shot. Now mind you, Downey, I would do nothin', one way nor another, to help the police, but we don't want no sech bird on Halfaday as this Dan Hayne!"

VI

THE arrest was made without incident, and the man locked in a cell. He made a complete confession the following morning when confronted by the evidence which included the stained bills, and the easily demonstrated fact that the manager had been killed by a bullet fired from the revolver he had in his possession at the time of his arrest. He told of witnessing the hold-up on Front Street, and of slipping the robber the word that the police were looking for him, and of advising him to skip to Halfaday Creek.

Noting that the man was about his own size and build, he procured a blue bandanna with white dots, and slipping out

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next day, pulled the D-Y job, then fled with the dust to Halfaday, to find that the man, Lewis, had not arrived there yet.

Drawing a name from the can, he learned of Whiskey Bill's abandoned shack and moved in. Then he watched the lower creek and when Lewis arrived, a few days later, he steered him into Olson's old shack.

The man told him he had been delayed by heading up Ladue Creek until he met an Indian who set him right.

Hayne said he watched his chance and shot the man with his own gun, holding it close against his head to make sure of leaving powder marks. Then he carefully wiped the gun and pressed the man's hand upon the butt—his finger upon the trigger. He then wrote the suicide note, left the manager's watch in Lewis' pocket, robbed him of all but twenty dollars of the fruits of the Front Street robbery, leaving two tens in the wallet, so no robbery would be suspected. Then he returned to Whiskey Bill's claim, confident that he had cleared himself of all suspicion.

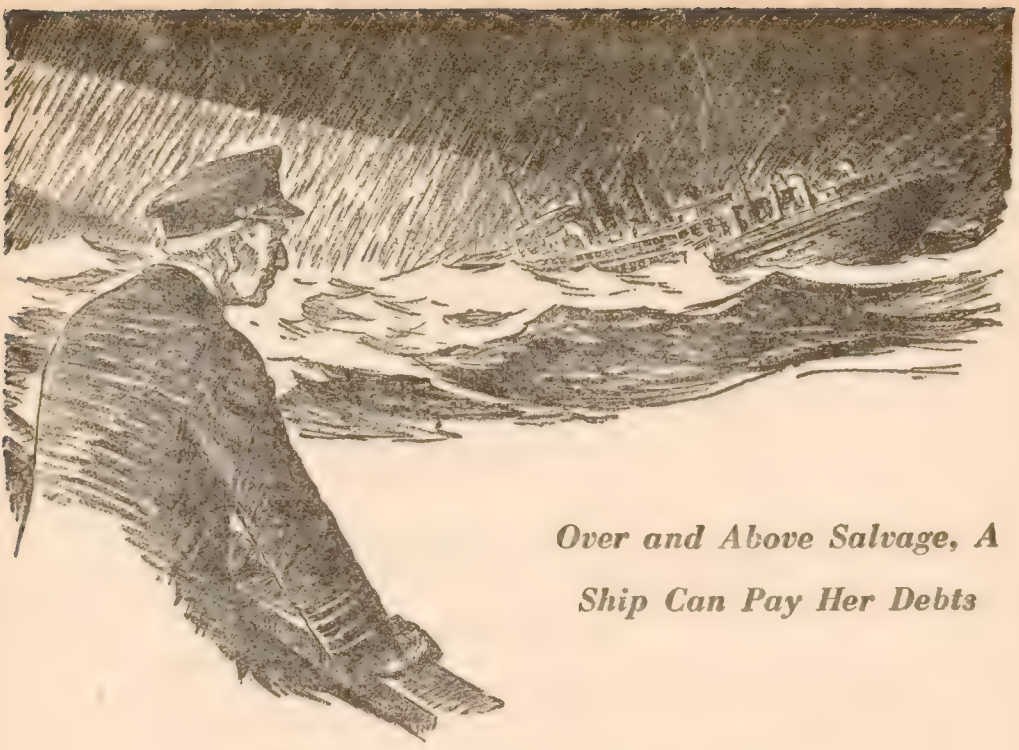
HE SAID that the twenty-five hundred ounces of dust was cached near Whiskey Bill's shack, and drew a detailed map of the location of the cache.

The following morning, accompanied by Black John, Corporal Downey set out for Halfaday.

Proceeding directly to Whiskey Bill's claim, they located the cache without difficulty. It was empty?

Downey eyed Black John sternly. "You would have made a wonderful policeman, John—except for one thing. Whenever a corporation happens to be the victim of a robbery—you are never able to locate the loot!"

Black John grinned broadly. "Oh, hell, Downey—don't let that worry you none! Cripes—you're a damn good policeman! An' I kin rec'lect quite a few times, like this one here, when you ain't be'n able to locate the loot, neither."



Over and Above Salvage, A Ship Can Pay Her Debts

FULL PAYMENT

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

Author of "The Small Man," "A Question of Insult," etc.

THE brisk and efficient young Mr. Garvin, general manager of the Capstan Line, drummed impatiently on his desk with a yellow pencil and shook his head.

"I'm afraid I can't alter my decision, Captain Wetheral," he said. "You must see my viewpoint. The *Jessie R* is nothing but a liability tied up in the creek, and there isn't a chance for us to put her back into service the way times are. It would cost too much to fix her."

"She's earned her keep and her repairs," said Captain Wetheral with a touch of exasperation. He peered over the top of his spectacles. "Nearly thirty years in service. It doesn't seem right to sell her foreign. Your grandfather'd never have done it. The *Jessie R* was the first ship the line built."

"Let's not bring in my grandfather," objected young Mr. Garvin. "The old gentleman knew shipping, and he was all right for his times, but times change. There isn't any place for sentiment these days. I've got a board of directors to face, and a lot of stockholders wanting dividends. The *Jessie R's* been tied up for two years now, and I don't mind telling you I've only kept her that long out of deference to my grandfather's memory, which I suppose at that is some sort of sentiment which I shouldn't allow to influence me. It's the same thing that's made me keep you and Mr. Watkins, your old chief engineer, aboard as caretakers, since the line doesn't give pensions."

"We both appreciate that," said Captain Wetheral slowly. "I'm sixty-seven and the chief's near seventy. We'd have had a time making a living if we'd been let go."

Mr. Garvin nodded. "Well, let's consider the matter settled then. You can sail the *Jessie R* on her last run, for the sake of old times. Take her south to San Felipe. The Alvarez Company will take her over and you can bring the crew back steerage on our *Alice R.* She'll wait over for you in San Felipe."

"I guess that's all then, sir," said Captain Wetheral, and stood up, creaking a little.

He was lined and white-haired and bent, but his blue eyes were still bright in the heavy tan of his face, and he had not entirely forgotten how to smile. Mr. Garvin stood too and shook hands.

"I'll find you and the chief some sort of berths as watchmen when you get back," he promised. "I know how you feel about the *Jessie R,* but we have to face facts. She's no use rotting at the buoys, and even there she costs money to keep her from falling apart."

"Aye," agreed the captain reluctantly. "Ships are like women. Always expensive." He put away his spectacles. "I helped design her nearly thirty years ago, and I've been her only master. Seems queer to be losing her now, but I take it kindly you're letting me handle her on the last run."

"Sentiment again, Captain," laughed young Mr. Garvin. "I'm afraid I'm not as efficient as I should be. By the way, you'll tow to the Branson Dry-dock next Wednesday, so you'd better start finding a crew. Branson's will slap some paint on her and patch her up for the run. She's got to look a bit respectable."

"Branson's are a cheap outfit," the captain observed and Mr. Garvin shrugged.

"It's the best we can afford for a cheap ship. I'm afraid you'll have to stomach it."

"Aye, sir. I understand," the old sailor muttered, and brushed a quick hand across his eyes. He added irrelevantly, "I see where the *Ivanhoe* is sailing day after tomorrow, sir. She was built about the same time as the *Jessie R.*"

YOUNG Mr. Garvin eyed the piled-up papers on his desk and restrained his impatience. These old men had to be humored.

"The *Ivanhoe's* owners are in a better position than we are," he explained, not unkindly. "And she's a bigger, faster ship with a fat mail contract." He frowned a little as he remembered something. "Isn't she the ship you saved some years ago when she was going ashore?"

"That's what I was thinking of, sir. It was the *Jessie R* that towed her clear of the Lassiter Reefs when she'd lost her propellers and the gale was hammering her. Three hundred passengers on board and her cargo shifted. It was quite a fight for the *Jessie R.* I always figured the *Ivanhoe* owed her a debt for that."

"Her owners paid heavy salvage, as I recall," said the younger man curiously. "We were very well satisfied."

Captain Wetheral nodded. "Aye, sir. I suppose you were. But I was thinking of the *Jessie R.*" He left the office, methodically adjusting his hat, and Mr. Garvin pressed the buzzer for his secretary. He was still frowning. "What the devil does he mean?" he muttered. "The *Ivanhoe* owes a debt to the *Jessie R!* These old men get the damndest ideas!" He shrugged and went back to work.

On the sidewalk outside the big Capstan Line Building, Captain Wetheral shivered a little and fastened his greatcoat. It was bitterly cold, and there was frost on the windows, and flurries of snow were coming down from an ash-gray sky. There was an icy wind cutting along, swaying the branches of the naked trees in the little park across the street, while passers-by hurried with bent heads and hands thrust deep in coat pockets. Captain Wetheral hesitated a while and then went into the Bowhead Saloon where he bought a bottle of rum.

Presently he plodded down to the creek, a quiet, sullen backwash from the great bay, where he climbed into a dinghy, and

rowing with the short, hard strokes of a deep-water man went out to the *Jessie R* swinging idly at her buoy. He ran alongside, made fast to the gangway, and climbed to the main deck. The tall, bony figure of Mr. Watkins, dressed in a faded chief engineer's uniform, and with a greasy peaked cap thrust back on his bald head, hailed him from the shelter of the saloon doorway.

"Did you get the bad news?" he inquired sourly, and Captain Wetheral nodded.

"Aye, Jim. She's being sold foreign and we're taking her. Young Garvin was considerate enough for that. He means well. So we tow to the Branson dock Wednesday for a cheap going over, and we sail as soon as she's ready." He pulled the rum bottle from his pocket, a little self-consciously, and added, "I thought we could stand a celebration—sort of—before we start."

He stared along the *Jessie R's* snow-streaked, windy decks and shook his head. The ship did not look as neglected as might be, though he knew she could never pass an insurance survey now without an extensive overhaul. In this quiet, glum backwater a dozen vessels were beached or tied to the rusty buoys, rotting, forlorn, and desolate; fouled with gull-droppings and creaking wearily as the tide slapped their hulls and the wind moaned through the frayed rigging. The *Jessie R* looked neat beside them. The two old men had tended her as best they could, even to the extent of spending most of their small wages on her. Her wooden decks were clean. Her hatches were neatly battened. Canvas covers were on her tallow-coated winches and capstan; on her telegraphs and binnacle; and her brass ports and her siren were shining. Her hull was rust-streaked, of course, and she needed fresh paint on her houses, but compared to the other vessels that were dying in that creek she was still a respectable ship.

The two men went silently into the ghostly, faded white-and-gold saloon that had once seated a hundred passengers, and they sat at the captain's table, the center table near the for'ard bulkhead. The other tables, the red-plush swivel chairs and the long sideboard were covered with old sheets now, and there was dust on the thick red carpet and on the pictures of ships that lined the paneled bulkheads.

"Well," said Captain Wetheral, opening the bottle with assumed cheerfulness. "I suppose it was bound to come. Sold foreign or broken up for scrap. I guess we were a bit too wishful, thinking they'd some day put her back in service."

"It's a crime for the dagoes to get her," said Mr. Watkins moodily. He lighted a stubby pipe and pulled on a straggly gray mustache. "They never keep ships up."

"Aye, Jim," agreed Captain Wetheral. "She'll find it mighty strange when she's neglected. Poor old girl."

They drank then and were silent for a long time, thinking back, while outside the wind clawed at the old hull and the snow whirled down.

"'Tis a pity we can't get some of the old crowd to help take her," the captain went on at last. "But I've lost touch with most. Clem Louder's dead, so is Banning, our chief steward for ten years; the last ten. Remember? Farrington was lost at sea two years ago. Bud Lawler, my old mate, is skipper in the Cunard, and I heard your old third engineer is chief in the Zeeland Line now. They couldn't get away. I guess it'll just have to be you and me, Jim."

"It's just as well, I'm thinking," said Mr. Watkins sourly. He blew his nose with unnecessary noise. "You and me's the only ones who've been with her since the first." He poured another drink and waggled his bald head. "I think—maybe—the old girl will like it that way—sort of."

They talked together for a long time. Two old men in the past, recalling many things, while the tired, worn ship creaked and complained about them. The cry of the gulls came eerie from the snow-flur-

ries outside, and from far-off the sirens in the bay were mournful, saying good-by—good-by. But they did not hear them.

THE *Jessie R* slipped out to sea almost unnoticed. There were no crowds to see her off as there had been in the old days. A few lines in the marine news told of her passing, and the older men along the waterfront gossiped for a while. And then she was forgotten, almost before her smoke vanished from the harbor. New and bigger ships were docking, were sailing, and the flags and the bands would play for them until they too, in their turn, went to the rusty buoys in the quiet creek.

Captain Wetheral came slowly to himself as the *Jessie R* began to lift to the long swells of the open water, running foam-flecked beneath an icy, clear blue sky, and he said good-by to the pilot almost mechanically. He had been dreaming there by the for'ard rail, staring unseeing at the bows sawing up and down to the winter sea, as he had stared at them for nearly thirty years from the same vantage point. The departure had seemed very unreal, and he had tried to imagine there were passengers below decks, busy unpacking, and perhaps already seasick, and there was mail in the hold, and fat cargo. He shivered to the bite of the wind, and hunched his shoulders so the collar of his greatcoat covered his ears as he dismissed his phantasies and coldly remembered that the passenger cabins were all locked and deserted, and the holds were creaking empty, and the mail was on board the *Ivanhoe* now.

He took a turn up and down the bridge, looked at the compass and then at the chart. In the bridge wing the second mate was banging his gloved hands together and stamping his feet, his breath like a small cloud, while from the foredeck, where the crew was busy tidying up, there was rough, cheerful language and some laughter. Captain Wetheral managed a little smile at that. All this meant nothing to the crew, of course. Mostly brash young men thinking the run south more of a holiday than anything else. No real work to do; and a free ride home as passengers. Taking out an old hulk to be sold foreign. What should they care? If some of the old crowd could have been rounded up, the captain thought, it would have been different. But perhaps it was as well. It might have been even a sadder voyage than it was going to be, with all the old faces about.

He said to the second mate after a while, "Carry on, Mister. And call me when Point Sayre's abeam." The second mate said, "Yes, sir," through chattering teeth, and waiting until the old man had disappeared he ducked into the warm chartroom for a smoke. Mr. Watkins was already up from his engine room and in his cabin, wiping his hands on a wad of cotton waste, when Captain Wetheral arrived.

"Well, we're on our way, Jim," the captain observed soberly. He stripped off his greatcoat and dropped to a chair, and lighted a crumpled cigar. "I sort of feel out of it with this crew. How's things below?"

"Fair enough," said Mr. Watkins rubbing his bald head. He looked melancholy. "It's not much of a run anyway and I've a couple of assistants who seem to know their work. I haven't much heart for it myself."

"I know," Captain Wetheral muttered. "I know." Mr. Watkins blew through his stubby pipe, filled and lighted it and puffed scowling. The steam radiator in the cabin rumbled and hissed, and the ship's clock ticked loudly.

"The engines are in good shape now. But I'd likely have apoplexy if I saw them in six months. That San Felipe crowd'll let them go, and they'll be scrap before you know it. *Mañana,* always *mañana.* I've seen ships sold foreign afore."

"Aye, Jim," the captain agreed, very gently. "She'll be rat-ridden and full of lice soon. And the paint work blistered, and rust on her rails. And they'll never learn how to humor her in a head sea."

He waved his cigar and smiled. "Remember how the ways caught fire when we launched her, Jim? And little Johnnie Simes got his pants burned."

Mr. Watkins grunted and his pipe gurgled as he sucked on it.

"There was that head carpenter too," he said. "What was his damned name—Benson or something?—got tangled in a line and was hauled into the basin after her, and nearly drowned afore we got him clear. There was a big crowd that day, and the line bought all the drinks." He sighed and smacked his lips. "And free beer."

Captain Wetheral took out his glasses and put them on, the better to peer at a framed photograph of the *Jessie R's* launching that hung above the chief's desk.

"Aye," he said. "Aye, Jim. That was a time. And you'll call to mind that voyage when she stuck her nose on a sand bank in the Red Sea and it took us two days to kedge her off. A hundred and twenty in the shade and there was no shade. That was the time Billy Emlet dropped dead, wasn't it?"

"That was the time," affirmed Mr. Watkins. "He'd been drinking heavy as I recall. Came up through the fiddley to get a breath of air and just keeled over. I remember his widow blamed me for keeping him below in the heat. As if he belonged anywhere else on duty."

The engineer's messboy put his head inside the cabin door to deliver some message, and when he had gone the two old men sat for a while in silence while the air grew thick with tobacco smoke, and the deck lifted and fell, and they could feel beneath them the steady, sweet, rhythmical pulsing of the engines.

"You know," said Captain Wetheral at last, "she never really was the same after she pulled the *Ivanhoe* off the coast that time. I always figured she strained herself too much, maybe broke her heart fighting as she did. It was too much of a load."

"It's a fact we never did get her to trim just right afterwards," the chief admitted, frowning. "And I think you've said she's harder to steer than she was."

"Bad starboard helm," said the captain. "She never had any funny notions before. And we never did figure it out. Not that you could expect much else but for the old girl to act a bit cranky after the *Ivanhoe* business. Three lines broken, and we lost the port anchor. A lot of other stuff too. Tearing her innards out to get that big hog to sea. More'n sixteen thousand tons, and the weather making, and the tide rips swinging us. It's a wonder we didn't go ashore ourselves. *She'd* have for certain if the *Jessie R* hadn't hung on. I always figured the *Ivanhoe* owed her something for that."

MR. WATKINS nodded and fumbled with his mustache, while the two of them thought back to that gale-swept night when the *Jessie R* had answered the SOS of the giant *Ivanhoe*, whose propellers had gone, whose steering gear had jammed; three hundred passengers panicking with hysteria and an iron coast to leeward where the hammer of the wind and the giant seas were sending her. The *Jessie R* had clawed up through the lightning-riven blackness, tried to get one boat away with a line, and had lost six men when the boat was tossed skyward and upturned. They had had to resort to rockets in the end, firing nearly a dozen over the *Ivanhoe's* sea-washed decks before her men caught the light marline and eventually hauled the towing wire aboard.

They had started the struggle then, the *Jessie R*, boring ahead into the giant storm, her own decks filled with white water, both ships plunging, shaking themselves as they came up after each lunge, the heavy wire bouncing like a skipping rope until it parted. Two more bitter hours in the smother to make the connection again, and the iron coast coming nearer. And the stokers in the *Jessie R's* fireroom staggering on the reeling plates, burning themselves

as they were flung against the firedoors. Trimmers half-buried in the sliding bunker coal. Two seamen washed overside. One trimmer brained against a bunker bulkhead. The third mate with a broken arm when he was flung off the bridge companion. Crockery smashed; the galley swept and ruined; the saloon flooded! Steampipe casing gone; three wire reels; engineroom skylights caved in; number four hatch smashed through; four boats lifted from their chocks and turned over and splintered! And then the wire had parted again, and again they had had to maneuver for position, and try and smooth the seas with oil. And before morning it had all happened yet again, ripping the smaller vessel's after bitts clean out of the deck, and crippling the bosun. At one time both ships had been within a few cable's lengths of the grim Lassiter Reefs, where the foam shot thirty feet in the air as the hard water broke in ruin upon the steep-to rock. There could have been small blame if the *Jessie R* had saved herself then, taking no chances, and let the bigger ship hit. Better one ship than two going to pieces in the smother. But the *Jessie R* had stuck, made one last try, and in the end, twisting, wrenching—every plate, and rib, and beam sweating with the agony of it—she had drawn the *Ivanhoe* clear and delivered her, stripped and battered but safe, to the hands of the coastguard.

"Aye, Jim," said Captain Wetheral softly. "The *Ivanhoe* owes her a debt for that. Salvage don't cover it the way I think, though maybe I'm getting old and queer to say so. She's never been the same ship since. Maybe young Garvin knows it somehow, though he's no sailor. Just good for selling foreign."

"And after they've worn her heart out racking her around in the coast trade they'll scrap her," muttered Mr. Watkins. The captain threw his cigar into the spittoon as if it suddenly tasted bitter.

"Aye, Jim. They'll rip out her 'commodations to make space. They'll let her decks warp and rot. They'll load her with bones and guano and hides and such stinking stuff, and when she's no more use at sea they'll slice her upper works off to make her a coal hulk, and when she's done for that they'll rip her to bits. I know the breed. The old girl don't deserve that, Jim."

MR. WATKINS inspected the bowl of his pipe and then looked fixedly at the deckhead where a large cockroach was making leisurely progress.

"I've been thinking," he said absently, and coughed. "I've been thinking, since there ain't much else to do. We pass close to Emerald Shoals about dark, as I recall this run."

Captain Wetheral grew suddenly still and some color drained from his face.

"They run steep," he whispered. "I've been thinking too."

"The old girl owes the line nothing any more," said Mr. Watkins. "She's paid her way. She made the line, for that matter."

"It wouldn't be hard," whispered Captain Wetheral. "And there's no underwriters to complain. She's not insured this run."

"If someone opened the sea-cocks—sort of forgetful like—just before it happened," said Mr. Watkins dreamily, "she could go easy."

"Only fourteen miles to shore," the captain whispered again. "Only fourteen. Calm weather likely. Just a good long pull and all hands safe."

"It'd be better than rust on her rails and guano and hides inside her, and the engines falling to pieces while they racked her around."

"And being a hulk in the end, and then furnace scrap. She's done her bit. And we've known her a long time; a long, long time. She deserves it. A clean drop. No one to maul her about."

"Aye," said Mr. Watkins.

"Aye," said Captain Wetheral. Mr. Watkins blew his nose hard, while the

captain stood up and put on his greatcoat with hands that shook.

"We're both mad," he muttered. "We both love the old ship. Nearly thirty years of her. But we're forgetting. We're both sailors too." He paused a long moment and said harshly and aloud, "There's no place for sentiment in business, Jim! Young Garvin told me that! We've got to dock her at San Felipe!"

"That's the order," agreed Mr. Watkins. He made a vague, tired gesture. "All right, Skipper. What else?"

"Nothing," said the captain hurriedly. "Nothing Jim. I've got to be going. The *Ivanhoe* ought to pass us tonight on her way back home. 'Tis a shame it's not us taking her run. And her owing the *Jessie R* all she has. Damn her!" His voice was bitter.

He left the chief engineer staring bleakly before him and he went up on the bridge. He paced feverishly back and forth for a while, gnawing his lips, and his hands opening and shutting inside his pockets. He went into the chartroom finally, pulled open a drawer and found the chart he wanted. He smoothed it out on top of the chart they were using at the moment, and he bent over it, adjusting his glasses. The Emerald Shoals.

"Point Sayre's abeam, sir," said the second mate, coming in with a banging door and a gust of cold air, and Captain Wetheral jerked furiously upright, his face ashen and the sweat sudden on his face.

"Get out of here!" he choked. "Get to hell out! Who asked you—?"

"You told me to call you when we had the point abeam, sir," said the astonished second mate, and Captain Wetheral controlled himself.

"I'm sorry, Mister," he managed. "But you startled me. Go away, I'll be out in a moment."

The second mate withdrew, staring, and the captain wiped his face. He put the chart hurriedly back into the drawer, shaking badly, and then went to his room for a drink. For once in his life he felt he needed it.

THE dusk came early that day, with new flurries of snow and a bitterness of driving sleet. The sky turned from a sickly gray to the color of a funnel smoke shredded with the wind, and then merged to an ugly reddish black as the sun set somewhere behind the murk. The sea eased into smooth, long and lead-like swells, overrun with water-smoke; and then quite soon everything was suddenly black. The *Jessie R* bored on dispiritedly, heaving her bows up with a wash-back of white water, and then lunging hard down as the swells passed beneath her. It was hardly possible to see the glow from her masthead light in the thickness of the sleet and snow, and crusts of ice formed over her sidelights now and then, breaking away as the electric warmth loosened them. The ship's siren blared mournfully at regular intervals, and in the chartroom Captain Wetheral sat on the settee and stared blankly before him, his hands dangling on his knees and his lined face set hard.

"You never dropped below for dinner," observed Mr. Watkins, coming into the chartroom and wiping the sleet from his mustache. "So I thought I'd come see." He glanced at the untouched tray of food on the chart table and groped for his pipe, his sour voice softening. "Is it so very bad, Skipper?"

Captain Wetheral blinked once or twice and then looked at him, managing a faint smile.

"I can't do it, Jim," he muttered. "I thought I could. I had it all fixed. But I can't do it. I tried. I almost gave the word to alter the course, but I didn't. We'd be on the shoals in another hour if I had. But we'll clear now."

Mr. Watkins nodded and struck a match. His own face was drawn.

"I've had—my troubles—too," he said huskily. "I thought you'd weaken. I thought I'd open the sea-cocks anyway and

not tell you until it was too late, or you found out."

"But you didn't," said Captain Wetheral, staring at him.

"But I didn't," the old chief engineer agreed. "I near turned them, but somehow—I don't know——" Captain Wetheral nodded.

"We've been too long at sea, Jim," he said gently. "We can't kill our own ship. Maybe the old girl will understand."

"So she'll rack up and down that stinking coast and she'll rot until no decent ship will want to lie next to her. And she'll swing as a coal hulk until she falls apart and then they'll break her up." Mr. Watkins swore very softly. "We should have left her when she was laid away, Skipper. It would have been better."

"Yes," the captain muttered. "Much better. But I helped design her. I stood over her building. I know every damned rivet and plate that's in her. I've commanded her since she was launched. And I swear I'd sooner see her on the clean, green weed, a hundred fathoms down, than go where she's going. That's the way a ship ought to finish. She'll feel queer when she's neglected."

THEY did not speak for a while, thinking again, and then Captain Wetheral fastened his greatcoat, adjusted a fur-lined pilot cap over his white hair, and went out on the dark bridge. Mr. Watkins helped himself to a spare coat hanging on the chartroom pegs and followed him, and they stood silent together at the for'ard rail, staring into the dark wall of snow and sleet that pressed against the frozen canvas dodger. The siren blared above them, sobbed and faded away.

"It's going to be a dirty night, sir," said the first mate, looming suddenly by. "I think maybe we should get more of an offing. We'll never sight the Armsdale light in this weather and there's a strong westerly set."

"Of course," said Captain Wetheral dully. "Make it so." He was about to add something to that, as the mate turned for the chartroom, when there came a sudden, muffled siren roar close upon them, and with the abruptness of all disaster dim lights appeared blurred through the snow, and a great black bow loomed over the *Jessie R's* main deck rail.

There was hardly time to shout. The impact sent the *Jessie R* heeling on her beam ends, and there came a screaming of tortured metal. Sirens blasted. Captain Wetheral was flung clean across the bridge and into the wing, on top of Mr. Watkins, while the first mate, who had jumped for the telegraph, came up hard against the binnacle. The ship slowly righted, so it was possible to stand, and Captain Wetheral got up, shaking, and wiped blood from his forehead. He said something to the mate about rousing the crew and standing by—he never quite remembered what—and then bent over Mr. Watkins who was unconscious from a hard blow over one temple. A vivid searchlight played on the bridge from the other ship, as she held her bow fast in the great hole in the *Jessie R's* side, and a voice came wind-whipped and muffled through a megaphone.

"Are you badly hurt there? You'd better abandon."

Captain Wetheral did not need any reports to tell him that. He could almost feel the water pouring into the old ship, feel her settling. He shouted over his shoulder for the now useless helmsman to aid him, and he had the man carry the chief engineer to the main deck where the ramming bow was locked fast. The other ship was throwing pilot ladders and ropes over from her fo'c's'le-head, dropping their ends on the *Jessie R's* deck, and the *Jessie's* crew climbed up for willing hands to haul them over the rail. Captain Wetheral stumbled to his room for the ship's papers and the log book, and someone caught him as he fainted and passed him up to safety.

He came to a few minutes later to find

his first mate and some strange men bending over him, and the taste of brandy in his mouth.

"Are all hands—" he started and one of the strange men nodded.

"All safe," he soothed him. "All safe, sir. We're standing by as she goes."

They helped him to the rail, and he braced himself against it. Bathed in the powerful searchlight, and clear enough, though blurred through the curtain of snow and sleet, the *Jessie R* was sinking. Someone said in a strained, sympathetic voice, "It's not much use telling you how sorry I am, Captain. Just a sheer accident. But I know how you must feel."

"You've no idea at all how I feel," Captain Wetheral managed, and he was smiling. "No idea at all."

He found Mr. Watkins in a neat white bed in the neat white hospital about half an hour later. The chief engineer was conscious and seemed comfortable, his head thickly bandaged.

"He'll be all right in a day or so," the ship's surgeon promised. "Got a head like sheet iron."

"They tell me the old girl's gone, Skipper," said Mr. Watkins faintly. Captain Wetheral nodded and sat on the bed.

"Went like a queen, Jim. On an even keel. Fast, clean. She'll lie quiet and easy on the weed now, and I'll be glad to think of her there."

"No racking up and down the coast," said Mr. Watkins, smiling. "No guano and hides then, and the scrap heap in the end."

"Nothing," agreed the captain. "And no blame for any man." He hesitated a moment and then touched Mr. Watkins' arm, and he looked curiously puzzled, even perhaps a little frightened. "But do you know what, Jim? Do you know? This ship's the *Ivanhoe*. You remember we were due to pass her sometime tonight. The *Ivanhoe*, Jim. She paid her debt at last."

ENEMY RED

By

A. A. CAFFREY

Author of "Man Failure," "Test Flight Observers Don't Die," etc.

MAJOR BENT, being in charge of Aviation Section at Federal Proving Ground, received many complaints in his office. Being in the Army, the major did with all such expressions of grief just exactly what any Army man would do—passed 'em along down the line. Passed the buck.

Captain Call, being in charge of flying under Major Bent, was the man who had to field all such grief-packed tosses. Call, though, in so far as he was a captain, had a few tosses in his own right. Said tosses, or passes, could be made to and at the test pilots working out of Captain Call's busy office; and better than test pilots there are few things more objective and all-absorbing. Fact is, test pilots like complaints, thrive on grief, and go out looking for trouble. It's part of the job.

The latest Bent-to-Call-to-pilots play had to do with a complaint that reached the Bent office, via Washington—of all things!—from the Rolling Hills Country Club, a very swank establishment some fifteen miles west of Federal Proving Ground.

Taking the matter up with his seven able test pilots at the morning get-together, Captain Call asked, "Any of you gentlemen been rolling wheels on the inviting, rambling roofs of Rolling Hills Country Club's many buildings? Eh-eh, now! Don't answer. The benign expressions on your many innocent faces warn me that

Fact Is, Test Pilots Like Complaints, Thrive on Grief, and Go Out Looking for Trouble. It's Part of the Job.

nobody in these presence could possibly know anything of this matter in hand. Nevertheless, this official memo"—and Captain Call spread the Major Bent communication there on his desk before their eyes—"makes known that one Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch, Marine Corps, retired, has this day—the day being only yesterday—lodged a complaint with the Chief of Air Corps. The complaint," Captain Call went on, running a long finger through the lines of the text, "makes known that Rolling Hills Country Club is at present holding its mid-winter sports. No, gentlemen, this is not an advertisement for said mid-winter sports, nor, by the same token, is it an invitation to said swank games. Truth is, as they used to post on lawns down the San Antonio—dogs and soldiers keep off. Off Rolling Hills Country Club land."

"Just a shake, Captain," Lieutenant Murphy cut in. "Do I rate one of the usual, official three guesses here?"

"Make it," said Captain Call.

"I'll guess that the Rolling Hill's house committee, making its beef through this Brindle Jeer Paul. P. Patchwork, M. C., retired, now makes the point that Federal Proving Ground flyers can't even look down on the winter sports, eh?"

"Wrong, Murph'," Captain Call said. "They *have* looked in on said sports; and that's the reason for this, eh, how you say eet, m'sieur—beef? Ah, yes—beef. And just cause there is for a beef, too. It seems, gentlemen, that on the 3rd—let's

see, that was day before yesterday—a Proving Ground plane came down the ski jump. It came down said ski jump in close competition with one of the contesting jumpers. A jumper making his final try in the senior-members class. The jumper in question was none other than Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch, not Patchwork—and, by the way, Murph', don't you know who this Brig. Gen. Paul P. is?"

"I'll use the second of my regulation three guesses," Test Pilot Murphy said, "and guess that Brig. Gen. Paul P. is the guy who lost out in the senior-members class she jump."

"Why, hell, man," Captain Call enthused, "you're doing fine. The Brig. Gen. makes that point, right here in the complaint. But that's not all, Murph'. The Brig. Gen. is very much more than just an also-ran in a she class. Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch, M. C., retired, is also a very active member of the National Aviation Advisory Board. Does that mean anything to you, Murph'?"

"Sure," Murphy said. "It means I get to use the third of my regulation three guesses."

"Make it good, Murph'. Make it sure," Call warned.

"I GUESS—yea, I'll bet—the Brindle Jeer General is sore at the airplane guy who came down the she jump with him.

"Shucks, the old she-jumpin' devil can't take it. No sportsman. Just another pompous heel atop another official desk."

"And that, my friend, is where the hell comes in," said Captain Call. "Murph', the general and his playmates—a few thousand of them—were somewhat upset and surprised when that ship came down the ski jump with the general, but they weren't too upset to grab a number. The number was 99. 99, you know, is the test-hangar number painted on the rudder of the most important ship now under test in this establishment. And—"

"Just a shake, Captain," Murphy said. "I—"

"Got another guess coming up?" Call asked.

"Hell no. This is something I know, but something I almost muffed. I was the only guy who flew tests on 99 day before yesterday—on the 3rd."

"Yes, sir," said the captain. "You're as correct as the records, Murph'. I looked 'em over when this memo came in. Yep, you were the only one—officially, at least—who hopped 99 on that day. As for unofficial hops—Hangar Chief Hoff says that 99 was 'in work' all during the rest of that day. In work with Loose Lip Lock in charge; and old Loose Lip swears the ship was not out of the hangar—except when you had it."

Six other test pilots just stood around, shifted a bit, and looked at Murphy. Captain Call drummed his fingers on the memo still spread atop his desk. Finally, knowing only too well that the next play was his, and that Captain Call would make no accusations, nor even ask the point-blank question, Lieutenant Murphy said, "Hell, Captain, I wasn't within a dozen miles of Rolling Hills on that hop. Fact is, I haven't been over in that neck of the woods during the past few weeks. My work on the 3rd called for a few power dives and pull-outs. I made them just off shore, out here to the east of the reservation."

"Well, Murph'," the captain said, "that ski jump thing would be just your dish. Let's see—didn't you roll your wheels on one of Rolling Hill's fairways during the National Amateur Golf Tournament last summer? Still and all, if you say you weren't present, day before yesterday, on the ski jump, I'll take your word for it. You know I will. But the official test-hop records show, beyond doubt, that you and 99 were together in the air between two and four o'clock of that afternoon. So we'll have one devil of a time proving that ship 99 came from somewhere, zoomed over the top of the hill and raced

Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch down that snowy runway—without you."

"What if there was a ship with 99 on it?" Murphy asked. "Perhaps there're a few hundred ships, here and there all over the U.S.A., numbered 99. After all, who knows. Maybe it was two other fellows—in an ox cart, or in a bobsled."

CAPTAIN CALL ran his finger across another line of the official, from-Bent-to-Call memo. "Not a chance," he said. "They not only snatched numbers but say here that it was a small biplane; and that it disappeared in the positive direction of Federal Proving Ground."

"Now there's where their case cracks up," Test Pilot Mowat said. "No Federal pilot with half a brain would pull a stunt like that, then disappear in the positive direction of the home field. Let's ignore the whole thing, Captain."

"Would that I could," moaned Captain Call. "Would that I could. But old playboy Paul P. Patch, M. C., retired, is one gent whom we small fry can't ignore. He's the big noise on the National Aviation Advisory Board. This particular 99 ship, this damned-swell Merriam pursuit job, is the best biplane this or any other country has ever had; and I don't need to tell you men that. What's more, we don't need to tell the navy anything about this Merriam. You know as well as I do that it's a toss-up between Air Corps and Navy as to who'll get first production rights on the job. Navy wants them for the carriers; and Navy has a hell of a strong argument there. Air Corps, as you know, wants this job for airdrome defense. And if we've done anything here on Federal to upset the old apple cart, well it's just too bad. There'll be hell to pay. And old Paul P., they tell me, is the high pressure guy on the N.A.A.B."

"Well, what the hell," said Murphy. "That means Air Corps came to bat with two strikes on it. If old Paul P., retired, is an M.C. jiggereer brindle he'd naturally throw his weight for Navy."

"Not at all," objected Captain Call. "Murph', there's nobody can be more neutral—when it comes to Army vs. Navy—than a Marine Corps man. Especially a retired Marine Corps man. He's spent a whole life betwixt and between—disagreeing with Navy, envying Army, hating each. Once retired, he spends the rest of his life trying to find ways and means to harass and inconvenience both. I'll let you men in on something—Chief of Air Corps office sees a valuable ally in old Paul P. Of late during the past few months of N.A.A.B. deliberations, the old boy has bent his manly weight our way. Air Corps got that new Martin observation job. Also first call on fortress production by Boeing. No, Murph'; you can't say that Air Corps comes up under the two-strike handicap just because Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch happens to have gone down to the sea in ships—when he was young." Then Captain Call laughed a bit, and added, "I even hear tell it's another case of 'the captain hates the sea.'"

Lieutenant Mowat laughed and added, "Or at least the Navy. That is, a few small items in the Navy."

CAPTAIN CALL looked up at Mowat and asked, "How do you mean—a few small items? Say-y-y," the captain then drawled, "what was I talking about when I said Army, or at least Air Corps, couldn't cut in on Rolling Hills doings? I forgot you, Mr. Mowat. You kick around over there a bit, eh? You have the old social entree, eh what?"

"Yeah, I get around," Mowat smiled. And Mowat was the man who did get

around. Mowat moved with the best of them. He was Air Corps' Cholly Knickerbocker, Walter Winchell, Emily Post and High Hat Harry all rolled into one. "Maybe I should say the general hates one particular small item of Navy. That's this kid Lieutenant Mandeville, Navy Air's flying fool. You men remember young Mandeville. He was the fly young squirt who stripped the wings and tail service off that K-6 Navy pursuit job in a 23,000-foot dive, about three months back. Remember that? All the papers were full of it. Don't you recall, the kid stepped out of that stripped fuselage when it was within a thousand feet of the ground? They say he rode that dive for fully 27,000 feet. About 23,000 with wings. Then all of 3,000 without."

"And what part of that," Murphy asked, "didn't the general like—the part where the kid bailed out?"

"No," Mowat grinned. "The part where the kid stepped out. You see, young Mandeville had hardly landed from that chute drop before he collected old Paul P. Patch's lone gal, Patsy, stepped down into Virginia and took a second big dive, all in one and the same day."

Captain Call pushed a few objects around on his desk. He said, "Yeah, I recall that. But that's all water over the dam and under the bridge. The old boy had that hasty annulled. The jail bait, this Patsy gal, was so young that she lied by at least two years in her attempt to get in the Navy. So, Mowat my man, why should the old gent run a temperature over an outlawed son-in-law?"

"But the Mandeville kid isn't definitely of the past," Mowat insisted. "Not by one dam' sight, Captain. Right now, while he's in the Navy, old Brig. Gen. P.P.P., retired, can make things rather uncomfortable for young Mandeville. Fact is, the old guy raised hell with Navy because Navy refused to raise hell with a junior officer who married without permission. I understand that old Patch really went round and round with Navy over that issue. His price for a stand-off on the issue was that Navy send young Mandeville to the Islands, or to an iceberg; but the kid seems to have Washington power in his own right—an uncle in Congress—and that set old P.P.P. back on his heels. Still and all, while the kid's in the Navy, and old P.P.P. is where he is, the kid will have to run single, keep out of Virginia Gretna Greens—and away from the Patch manse. But—*but*—the kid's getting out of Navy pretty soon."

Captain Call laughed. "Well, well," he said, "our family cats sure do have long tails. Hell's bells, we're sitting pretty. Why dam' them there Navy people and their Mandevilles. We-uns, we Patch people, must stick together. Yes, sir, gentlemen, all we Air Corps people have to do is keep our noses clean, keep away from Rolling Hills Country Club mid-winter games, and old Paul Patch will lean our way. You sure, Mowat old man, that the old boy is as sore as he should be? Sure that this young Mandeville is still in the dog house?"

"I am, and young Mandeville is," Mowat said. "I was over to Rolling Hills last night. They were holding the fancy skating events under the lights. That is, old Paul P. and the hardy ones were on the ice; but we of the softer stuff were kicking things around on that more-comfortable, super-heated clubhouse floor. Well, young Mandeville and some of the Navy outfit were on hand. Sure, the kid is right over here on Federal, over at the Navy hangars. I didn't know that till last night; guess he got the assignment just lately. Well, anyway, Patsy Patch was among the present last night; and if any guy thinks the Mandeville-Patch flame has flickered under that annulment blanket, then said guy is nuts. Old Paul P. doesn't think so, at least. And you'd laugh your head off if you'd seen the old cock last night. He spent the whole evening running back and forth—on the tips of his skates—between

the ice rink and the dance floor. He was trying to keep his eye on Patsy and the kid. And were they giving him the old run-around! This Mandeville boy is one heller from 'way back—full of hell. I can understand why the Navy doesn't jump him hard. The Navy needs guys like him.

"Anyway, as I say, the kid was doing his stuff last night. Old man Patch was all done up in a bright-red Tyrolean winter-sports costume—sort of a Santa Claus without whiskers. You know, the old boy was military attache to Austria for years. Also to Budapest and Bern. He's fought plenty wars on the ski slides and ice spaces of all those winter-spot countries; and, as they tell me at Rolling Hills, the old guy is really quite some shakes in all departments of the chill games. These mid-winter doings are close to his heart; and anything that cuts in, like Federal Proving ground planes on the ski run, is bound to catch hell from old Paul P., retired.

"But to get back to that gay, all-red Tyrolean costume. This gay-blade Mandeville kid had been to a costumer's and last night he was all done up in an exact duplicate of the old man's outfit—and the similarity was not accidental. It was purposeful, deliberate, planned with malice aforethought. And the kid alternated between the dance floor and the ice rink. He was swell on the former; and not half bad on the blades. Damn it all, you could hear old Paul P. come to a boil and sizzle whenever the kid took the spot!"

"Oh, that's fine. Swell," Captain Call enthused. "You think this young Mandeville is pestering the general, eh?"

"Pestering him? Openly ragging the old cove," Mowat said. "Some of the Navy men told me that the kid has always gone out of his way to ride old pompous Paul in public."

"Tell me more," Captain Call begged. "Tell me more." After all, Call's job was to get ships through test for Air Corps, and to make certain that Air Corps got good types. So he had a right to cheer when things seemed to be shaping up a little better on this Merriam pursuit matter, especially after this 99 set back.

MOWAT began laughing. "Well," he finally said, "the grand finale came just as the free-style fancy skating event was on the ice. Believe it or not, old P.P.P., retired, had won his way into the finals, too. And being big-shot Johnnie, old P.P.P. had arranged things so's he'd be the last contestant to do his stuff. Damn his old hide, if he didn't build up that top-spot act of his! And"—then Mowat began laughing like the devil—"damn the gay young Mandeville if he didn't build up his bit and top old P.P.P.

"So the last fancy-skating contestant was announced—Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch, Marine Corps, retired. And old P.P.P. made a long, outer-edge swoop and came out to mid ice on his right blade. The old guy actually posed and took a bow. Then he went into a backward outer-edge; and it was pretty. From there—after the applause went down—the old boy began shuffling the blades through as pretty a grapevine as you've ever seen; and he hung the grapes on that vine with the ease of a young squirt. That brought the gallery down with a cheer. You don't see many of these fancy-pantsy ice experts skate a grapevine, you know.

"Then the high spot arrived. Old Paul P. came to a stance at mid ice. The announcer said that the general would now assay some of his famed, dangerous spins—and such. And at that exact split second all the rink lights went out. Then the spotlight fell at old Paul's feet. Just one glob of light there on the ice, at old Paul's feet. A second later, that glob of light was moving away, northward along the ice, through the rink-side crowd, up along the lower level of the long ski-run hill—then right up that snowy slide to the bottom of the jump-off platform. And there, just under the overhang of the jump-off platform, that spotlight came to rest and

framed a figure in red. It was as though the light had taken that first red-clad figure—old Paul—away from the rink's ice and brought him up, then set him down, there at the top of the slide.

"Yeah, you've guessed it," Mowat laughed. "It was this Mandeville devil. And on young Mandeville's shoulders, like an adagio dancer, was Patsy Patch. The kid was on skis. He took a bow, let out a 'Yi-pee! Ride 'em!' then shoved off. Man, oh, man, you never saw such loony doings.

"Like a bat out of hell, that red flash came down the slide. And the gal stayed right there—on the kid's shoulders.

"That ski run ends right down on the skating pond, you know. So the rink-side crowd broke and ran, opening the way for that oncoming red flash. But old Paul P. just froze there at mid ice, eyes bugged, wordless—for once. And down came Mandeville, hit the edge of the ice, did as nasty a fall as you'd ever hope to see, then slithered—with Patsy sliding along—clear across the pond. And at mid ice the slithering pair picked old Paul P. off his feet and carried that second red devil along. Oh, it was funny, but so damned ignominious—for pompous old Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch, M.C., retired; and that ending sure retired all doings for last night."

"That you should laugh, Mr. Mowat!" Captain Call kidded, getting out of his swivel chair and pacing across the flying office to take up his stand at the west-side, field-view windows of that above-hangar loft. "And that this unspeakable young Mandeville—Lord love 'im!—should make a bum of our general! Good old Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch, M.C., retired. Friend of Air Corps—I hope—and enemy of Navy—I pray. Let's all pray.

"And by the same token, let's do some little thing for the general. Let's do some little thing that will give Major Bent an opportunity to notify old Paul that we appreciate his position, and that due action has been taken. Let's mark Lieutenant Murphy 'on the ground.' Murph', consider yourself so marked. On the ground, feller, till further notice. Which means that you can just kick around these hangars, do this and that—but keep out of the air—and collect pay, as usual, from Uncle Sam."

"Not so good," Murphy said. "But if it will help the cause, who am I to ask the reason why? Especially in cold weather like this. Still and all, I'm the main motif of a great mystery; the little man who wasn't there—in 99—on that she slide."

SEVERAL inches of snow had fallen between midnight and dawn. For a few minutes Captain Call and his test pilots stood there at the west-side, field-view windows of flying-office loft and watched the bulldozers removing the last of that snow from the main, hangars-fronting apron. It would be a matter of a few hours' work before the lead-out and criss-cross take-off runways could be cleared for routine field work. Into the loft office came test hangar's star mechanic, Loose Lip Lock. He said, "Do some guys have it soft?" and nobody gave him the least attention. So Loose Lip strolled up behind the bulldozer-watching group and stood there staring down through the north-side windows—not toward field activities, but down into the hangar where

all those fine ships marked "In work," "Out of commission" or "O. K, for flight." Those fine ships were Loose Lip's pets, pests, greatest joys, deepest sorrows, and year-in-year-out companions.

"How about this 99 baby, Cap," Loose Lip asked; "does she hop today?"

"You bet," Captain Call answered, turning from the window. "Is she all set to do it, Lockie me man?"

"An' how!" said Loose Lip. "Man, I got that bay jus' right. An' is she one sweet job, eh? Long time since this hangar sheltered a pursuit job like this Merriam job. Look at her down there"—and Loose Lip's eyes had that beatific glow as he gazed down on 99's upper surfaces—"ain't she a darb, Cap? Look at that glassed cockpit hatch. Looks just like the glassed visibility panels in her belly. Damned if she don't look all-same top side or belly side!"

"Why sure," Test Pilot Sale put in. "Didn't you hear about the general confusion down in Final Assembly hangar when they were putting this 99 job together? Well, they got her out of the crate, hung her by the nose to a rafter, then argued for two weeks trying to decide which side took the landing gear."

"No? You wouldn't kid a guy, would you?" Loose Lip asked. "No kiddin', though, she looks all-same top or bottom. An' them straight, wide wings look all-same as the swell old wartime Spads. See how them there wings are right at the top of the fuselage, an' right at the bottom, too. An' that round rudder an' stubbed elevators and stabilizer. Know what they look like? You know, eh, Cap? They look like the old wartime Albatross-type tail service. Hell, them Albatross rudders was so near round that I see macs at Issoudun put 'em on upside down, an' never learn the dif. Murph', here, tells me this little crock flys that way too—just as good upside-down as she does in normal, belly-down flight. Eh, Murph'?"

"The other day," Pilot Murphy said, and with a straight face, "I was stunting this 99 out over the ocean. All of a sudden I rolled her into a cloud bank. For a minute—with no horizon to fly on—I didn't know what was up or what was down. So I just let her ride. Full gun. Hands and feet off. And she went right ahead. There was still no way to tell up from down. The cloud bank was big. I must have been in that green soup for five minutes. All of a sudden I noticed that my nose was red. The blood had all rushed to my head. I knew then that the ship was upside-down. But you'd never guess it by the way she handled. Yep, Loose Lip, this 99 is one darb."

"Aw, hell," said Loose Lip, "you wouldn't job a jobbie, would you, Murph'?"

"Kidding or not," Lieutenant "Nei-hi" Neihouser, admittedly the best stunt flyer in Air Corps, said, "this 99 is, without question, the best inverted-flight job we've ever seen. I can't see any difference in its handling whether upside-down or normal; and that's what makes it such a swell bet for Air Corps. A fighting pilot would not have to worry about his ship's position if he was sure she'd hold the altitude, upside-down, like this one will."

"Right you are, Lieutenant," Captain Call agreed, "and we're going to secure first production rights for good old Air Corps or know the reason why. Tell you what; you run today's test on 99. Let's see, she's in line for speed runs. So get in touch with the speed-course boys and tell them when you'll be over the course, how many rushes you'll want to make, etc., etc., and make sure that you keep 99 so far from Rolling Hills that they can't even reach you by radio."

LIEUTENANT MOWAT was laughing again. He said, "Better warn all these gents to keep all Federal ships away from Rolling Hills, Captain. This new fall of snow means that they'll be running off the cross-country snowshoe race some-

time today. That snowshoe trek takes 'em back over the hill-and-dale steeplechase course; and old P.P.P. is sure to be a contestant. Hell's bells, man, with trouble on the ski run, then on the fancy skating finals, it won't do to have the old gent come a cropper back there in the snow."

Captain Call looked at the gay Mowat. "What you laughing at, soldier?" he demanded. "You got any funny ideas?"

"No," Mowat said. "But, man, oh man, think of the possibilities—old Paul P. going across the white snows in his red Tyrolean costume while a keen-eyed air-going guy watches and waits overhead in a ship. Can you see that picture?"

"Let's try not to see that picture," Call begged.

It was well along toward noon before the main runways were completely cleared of snow. When pilots are hopping fast equipment such as is the order of the day at Federal, well they want to make sure that take-off and set-down strips are clear—and that there's plenty of said safety strips from fence to fence. So most of the assigned test hops were put over till after one o'clock. That was the reason why Lieutenant Sale didn't lift 99 off Federal till along toward two. Then, taking on no great altitude, he bee-lined it for the speed course—the five-mile, flagged strip over on the tractless marshes just east of test hangar. It was exactly three-fifteen when Sale came back over the high wire fence and put 99's wheels down on the home port. It was three-twenty when Loose Lip Lock, coming out to the edge of the apron to grab a wingtip, led Sale's taxiing ship into the great shelter of mighty test hangar. And it was just three-twenty-five when Captain Call took a call on his phone, picked up the receiver and heard Major Bent say, "Jump on your horse and come down here, Captain. We're in a jam, another jam. Brig. Gen. Patch just now called in from Rolling Hills. That such-and-which 99 ship has been over that territory again. The general didn't say exactly what it did. The general wasn't, eh, what you'd call audible. But he was loud. Anyway, get down as soon as you can."

Getting up from his desk, starting for the door and stairway beyond, Captain Call met Lieutenant Sale coming in. Call hooked an arm through Sale's right, swung the lieutenant back toward the stairs, and said, "Walk this way, young feller. You're just the man Major Bent wants to see. Oh, and that you should fail me!"

MAJOR BENT, with Call and Sale standing by for action, was unable to get Brig. Gen. Paul P. back on the phone. Rolling Hills club manager, though, told what was wrong. At about two-thirty—so related the club manager—the general was doing right smart by himself, leading the field in the snowshoe race. By that time—about two-thirty—the general had reached the steep down grade into Fox Den Gully. And just as the general was topping the far side of the hill that gives on the gully—coming this way, toward the club house and the finish line—a Federal Proving Ground ship came down in a dive. It almost brushed the general off that hill. The general lost his peace of mind. Lost his sporting sang-froid. Lost his footing. And tumbled—ankles over teakettle—into the deep snow of Fox Den Gully. It was awful—still according to the club manager—and some of the other contestants, overtaking the general's lead, had to stop and pull the old gentleman from that inverted position.

At this point in the telling, the club manager, being only human, said, "Eh, you'll pardon a bit of a joke, Major Bent? Well, some of the other contestants said—mind you, *they* said, not I—they said the old gentleman looked for all the world like a great red fox with its head in a hole—down there at the very bottom of Fox Den Gully. Ha-ha, the general, you know, was clad in his red Tyrolean costume. But

enough for levity, Major Bent. I'll tell the general you called; and that you are taking the matter in hand."

"Just a moment, Mr. Manager," Bent said. Then he asked, "Who identified this craft as a Federal ship?"

"Oh, we all did, Major. I saw it myself. It swooped low over this club as it passed on toward Federal Proving Ground. I even saw that number on its rudder—in the very center of its round rudder. It was 99. Yes, sir, Major Bent—99. The same ship that chased the general down the ski slide on the 3rd."

Major Bent hung up. He stared at Call. He glared at Sale. "You were test-hopping this 99 ship this afternoon, Mr. Sale?" he finally asked. Just that, nothing more. Flying men never like to ask those point-blank questions of other flying men.

"Yes, sir," Sale said. "And, sir, hard as it is to explain, I spent all my air time over the speed course. If you care to give the clockers a ring, I know they'll say that 99 wasn't out of their sight at any time between two and three-fifteen."

Major Bent rubbed his chin, scratched the lobe of his right ear, then finger-drummed the top of his desk and said, "I won't even ask the clockers. I believe you. Hell, Air Corps doesn't raise men dumb enough to go right back into the fire! And this convinces me that Lieutenant Murphy wasn't over Rolling Hills on the 3rd. Nevertheless, Lieutenant, you've got to be marked on the ground till this thing blows over. You won't mind that. We'll see to it that the set-down isn't carried on your record, nor on Murphy's. Damn these country-club civilians who know so much about aviation that they can spot a Federal job on the wing! And damn all those whose education is limited to the reading of 99!

"But through it all," Major Bent concluded, "we must do the right thing by Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch, M.C., retired. Bless the general. Bless all puffed-up political military men who sit on important national boards. And Lord bless us poor air people who have to cater to these other blessed. Guess that's all for now, gentlemen. But say, Captain; if it's humanly possible, get all tests on this Merriam job cleaned up. Let's close this book, make our report to N.A.A.B., submit our requests, and learn the worst. Let's have done with it! It's driving me nuts."

CAPTAIN CALL arrived in his office next morning to find Lieutenant Murphy and Sale sitting in the corner—on high drafting-room stools—and wearing dunce caps.

Captain Call said, "Perhaps you'd best move in another stool and roll another of those hats—I'm hopping 99 today. We're going to wash out some of the hops we'd planned and get this little Merriam job back into the lap of good old N.A.A.B., back in the hands of good old Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch, M.C., retired, for one of these days, pretty soon, he's going to run out of winter sports and get down to aircraft-procurement. By the way, Mowat old man, how many more days do these Rolling Hills games run?"

"Today's the closing date," Mowat said. "It's gymkhana and the pung races, this afternoon, are the big doings."

"Now don't tell me that old Paul P. is also of the horsey set—a horse marine, as one might say," Captain Call remarked.

"Hell, yes," Lieutenant Mowat said—"from 'way back! Why, the old boy keeps one of the best harness-horse stables in this country. He's one of the few remaining sulky racers; and he's the chief reason why Rolling Hills has kept its half-mile oval alive all these years. These pung races will be run off on that oval this afternoon—oh-o!"

"What do you mean—'oh-o!'?" said the captain.

"Think of the possibilities," said Mowat. "Horses coming down the home stretch—old Paul in the lead—and an airplane—"

"Stop it!" Captain Call yelled. "I can't

look. Where do you get such inspirational flashes, Mr. Mowat? By the way—I suppose you were over to Rolling Hills for last night's events?"

Mowat was laughing again; and he said that he was. "And damn that young Mandeville for one first-class clown," he went on. "The kid made a bum of our general. It was scandalous, no less. Sure, Patsy Patch was on hand, too. Hand in mitt with everything Mandeville pulled too. They did everything but walk on the ceiling. Yeah, the kid was all done up in that red outfit again."

"Were his Navy pals on hand?" Call asked.

"A few of them," Mowat said.

"I suppose they mentioned the general's coming a cropper during the snowshoe race?"

"Yes. They got me aside and offered their condolences, but, at the same time, asked me to excuse the laughter. I don't know whether they meant the laugh that's on us or the laugh that's on old P.P.P. However, while they were talking Mandeville edged into the group and said, 'That's the style, Air Corps—rub the old windbag's nose in the snow. Haw-ho!' and went on his way—still laughing."

"Not so good," Captain Call said, and he flopped thoughtfully into his swivel chair behind that desk of many troubles. "If Navy can laugh—despite young Mandeville's position with old Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch, M.C., retired—then, perhaps, there's something Navy knows and we're missing.

"Maybe they've got this Merriam job promised. Maybe they don't care what befalls old P.P.P. out there on the snow courses. Maybe the whole thing's in the bag for them—and with us working and worrying our heads off! Well, I'll tell you one thing—I'll take the last test hop in that 99 right now! Right now, this morning; and let me see any power on earth send a 99-marked ship over Rolling Hills today."

CAPTAIN CALL took off at nine o'clock and climbed into the high, cold air for what he intended as a long, important, many-purposed test hop. He flew 99 for altitude till the sub-zero cold drove him down. There was ice on the wings by then, but the good little ship handled O.K. He made a hard dive of the come-down. Even with ice aboard the panels and control surfaces the good little craft pulled out of the hard dive with ease. Then, at 10,000 elevation, he stunted her. Gave her the works. She stood up and handled fine. Yes, definitely, that Merriam pursuit job was worth fighting for. It was a ship in ten thousand. A ship in the lifetime of Air Corps.

When Captain Call ended that hard test flight it was ten: forty-five. He told Loose Lip Lock to ride herd on 99, from then on, and see that nobody, under any excuse or purpose, took that ship from the hangar. Then Captain Call went up the long wooden stairs to his loft office. Except for one man, the office was empty. That one man—sitting there in Call's own swivel chair—was Major Bent.

Captain Call pulled down to a full stop on the threshold. "Dammit, sir," he said, "I didn't do it."

Major Bent grinned. "Ah, you're a model pilot, Mr. Call," he said. "1917-

model, but I still think you're O.K. No, I'm not here with another complaint. Not this time. However, this has to do with Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch. His secretary called and said the general wished to see yours truly, and any others connected with the testing of the new Merriam pursuit

ship, at Rolling Hills Country Club. It's an invitation for lunch. This noon. So get your men together and my car will be ready, say—let's see, it's eleven now—m-m-m, well, we'll leave here at about twelve.

"Now," the major concluded, getting out of Call's chair, "I don't know what we're going up against, but we'll be on hand, and see what we'll see. You might bring your skates along. But if you do, also bring your water-wings, for we may be skating on thin ice."

Rolling Hills Country Club's extensive grounds was in gala throes of gymkhana when the Federal airmen unloaded from Major Bent's official U.S.A. staff car. Besides Bent and Call there were Murphy, Sale, Nei-hi Neithouser and Mowat. Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch's secretary, a Mr. East, met them on the steps of the main clubhouse.

"The general," Mr. East made known, "will be right in, gentlemen. He's been working out on the oval all morning. Got to drive the pung races this afternoon, you know. So just make yourselves at home, gentlemen."

The Federal airmen, passing in to make themselves at home, noticed that there were three Navy officers already doing that in the club's lounge. Major Bent knew these men; and the usual niceties were exchanged. That was all. This was going to be some sort of a show-down meeting. Ah, and here was another car unloading three gentlemen at the steps. Major Bent recognized these, too. They were some of the general's fellow members of the N.A.A.B. Yes, sir, this was the day of days.

It was along toward one-thirty before Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch came in. He was still red-clad, red of face, over-heated in spite of the snappy cold—and puffing. Right away, old Paul P. took Major Bent aside, over in an alcove, and went into work on that little matter of 99 razzing him on the ski slide—and again during the snowshoe race. In course of time, Bent called Call into the discussion. Then he called Murphy and Sale. Before it was over they were all talking with their hands. Old Paul P. was doing a sweat by then; and the Air Corps men knew that it was a bad sign for them. Off to one side, seated comfortably, the three Navy officers looked on, politely, and tried not to look like the three cats that had just tasted canary meat. It was Mr. East who removed the nasty pressure. He tiptoed into the alcove and advised the general that lunch was ready, waiting, growing cold. And old Paul P. snapped:

"Let it grow cold! I'm hot! An' getting hotter! But, well, er, ah, well—let's eat! All right, boys. This way, Navy, but dam' the dam' 99, an' the dam' pilot that flew the dam' thing when I—— Sit, everybody. I'm hungry." Then, while all hands studied the score card, trying to pick something that looked good, old Paul P. cast his card aside, ruffed his chin with the big right hand, and again mumbled, "99! Dam' the dam', etc., etc."

Finally, when the meal was well under way, they got down to the real business of the meeting. Paul P. called for Navy's opinion of the Merriam pursuit ship, and all three Navy men opened their hearts in praise of it. Navy air, especially the carriers, couldn't live without the Merriam. Then Bent and Call had their say; and they said all that was humanly possible. Without the Merriam job, Air Corps' pursuit groups would become pursued groups.

Into and throughout the arguments of each group, old Paul P. talked his full share. As for the other N.A.A.B. men, the three who had arrived together, they said little. It was apparent that, no doubt, they'd just come along for the ride—or for the meal. Old Paul P. was the mighty voice. And, as Bent and Company could see, old Paul P. again and again returned to Navy's views, requirements and requests. In short, old Paul P. was inclining his weight offshore. And when old Paul

P. finally excused himself—to answer a phone call at the desk—it was none other than Major Bent who leaned over toward Captain Call and mumbled, "Now you know what the Mighty Jacobs meant when he said 'I guess I otter stood in bed.'"

When old Paul P. came back to the table, from the phone, he was beaming, and rolling his hands. He was a changed man, but, the Air Corps felt, still definitely a Navy man.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we'll have to postpone these discussions for an hour or so. They're ready to run the first heat of the pung race. I'm driving this first heat, you know. Driving my best team of Morgans. You can step out on the veranda and take in the event. This way. And, on the side, my team will walk away with this event. Best team of Morgans that ever came down from Vermont. Wait till you see 'em go!"

There were half a dozen fine, blooded teams lined up at the starting line. A groom handed Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch, M.C., retired, the lines, and stepped out as the old boy stepped in behind the best-looking prancers on that line, a matched pair of Morgan bays.

The announcer, speaking over the public-address system, said it was to be a one-mile event—two laps of the oval—for the Rolling Hills' time-honored Snow Cup trophy, a cup that had come down through seventy-three years of just such meets. And he wound up with: "On this day, as in other years, our best horsemen, our foremost breeders, our ablest drivers are competing.

"First bay team, there on the pole, belongs to, and is handled by, our esteemed Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch, etc., etc."

"Boy, oh, boy," Lieutenant Murphy, standing there on the club veranda, said through the side of his mouth, "does the jigerdeer brindle take that stuff big! No dam' fooling—he's a Navy man."

"That's what I'm afraid of," said Captain Call.

MOWAT was laughing again. He said, "Get the general now." The Air Corps men studied the old boy's latest feature. It was a gay Tyrolean hat, plus feather, that Paul P. had taken from one of the pung's dash pockets. "Hell. It's no wonder the birds chase him—you can't fool birds," Mowat stated. "They know what they're after. Haw-ha! Is he in the groove!"

Then the race got under way. The gymkhana band was stirring up joyous, jingly sleigh-ride music. The colorful throngs were crowding the oval's rails. And the snow-tossing hoofs of six closely-packed teams were pounding along, going away on the first turn, swinging up through the far back stretch, coming around now into the first dash down the grandstand lane—and passing the starting line, with the first lap ended, and old Paul P.'s fine Morgans just shoving their blood-red, steam-blowing muzzles into the lead. It was a sight!

Half a minute more and the still-well-bunched pungs were coming around into the last turn—up there to the north of the clubhouse—and the watchers could see that Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch was in the lead by at least two lengths. This was to be his day of days. The Snow Cup trophy was as good as on the racket-room mantel in the Patch manse. Nothing could stop the old boy now, and——

"Oh-o! Oh-o! Oh-o!" Captain Call was oh-oing and pointing. Others were oh-oing, too; and all attention had quit the racing pungs. "Here it comes! And dam' right, it's a Merriam! And it's flying—"

Call didn't finish. The oncoming ship *was* flying. It was nose-down and flying right for—right at!—that red-clad racer in the leading pung.

But the spirited, race-crazed horses had heard that new, hellish roar just behind them. Back and forth went their ears. They rolled their wild eyes. They screamed that ear-splitting horse scream of fear—and the real race was on! Over the near

rail went one team, hanging its pung and driver on the top paling. Over the off-side rail went a second team, taking its pung and driver, plus the palings, with it. Two other teams broke, tried to turn, bumped, then rolled along the course in a ball of flying hoofs, kicked snow, wrecked gear and out-popping, bewildered, whip-holding, scrambling horsemen. Old Paul and the other team were the last in the race, but not for long. The Merriam pursuit job, nose still down, seemed closer to the race course than the low bottom of old Paul's pung; and when that Merriam zoomed—blowing its terrific slipstream blast down on them—the brave Patch Morgans went hog-wild, berserk.

The team broke in two different directions. They snapped breast straps and singletrees as though those pieces of harness and gear were shoe strings and matches. The off horse took the top rail on his side; and the nigh Morgan cleared the pole-side palings like a cat with a can on its tail. Old Paul and the pung—doing pretty well by themselves—coasted ahead toward the finish line, almost to that line, but lost sledding momentum within a scant twenty or thirty feet of a phoney win. The sixth and last pung swept past—each wild-eyed steed with the bit in his teeth—went over the line for the finish—then kept going right through the palings of the far south turn.

Old Paul sat there in his pung, almost directly afront the clubhouse, shook his two fists at the sky and at the Air Corps men on the veranda, and yelled, "Did ya see it! Did ya see it! There it is—making a turn! It's coming around, and—and it's that dam' so-and-so 99! D'ya see the 99? 99—see it?"

THE culprit ship was coming around. It was making a wide, through-the-trees turn, way off where Rolling Hills rough country rolls away to the east, toward Federal Proving Ground and the Atlantic. But if that ship was coming around for more of the same—for more jazzin' and razzin' of the snow sports—old Paul wasn't going to be caught out there in his pung. So, still shaking his fists and yelling, he clambered out of his horseless vehicle and made for the safety of that clubhouse's wide, sheltered veranda.

Arriving thereon, old Paul P. found the Air Corps men appearing not too downhearted. But the three Navy men, very solicitous of the general's safety, appeared jittery. They even turned dogrobber and —all three of 'em—began brushing the hoof-thrown snow and ice from the general's person. And old Paul P., noticing how motherly was Navy, and how unconcerned was Air Corps, exploded. Then he swung on the latter group with, "Well, now, what have you got to say? It was 99—that dam' 99—wasn't it?"

Major Bent pointed far afield, far across the oval to where that plane was flying north, and said, "It *was*, sir. It *was* 99. But look at it now."

The Navy men tried not to look. Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch did. His eyes bugged and he gripped the veranda's rail for moral support, or something. Off there low in the sky, hardly two hundred feet above ground, the Merriam job was rounding in for another dive at the doings. And as it made its last wide turn—and as Major Bent pointed and said, "It was 99"—the ship was flying a half barrel, getting what had been its top to the bottom, and what had looked like belly to the top, and the number on its rudder was then 66.

Major Bent turned to Commander Nashfield, one of the Navy group, and asked, "Has Navy a Merriam, number 66, under test runs over at Federal, Commander?"

Nashfield looked like a sick man and said, "Yes. Dammit, yes!"

In the north the ship that had been 99 and was now 66 had finished its wide turn. It was drilling back toward Rolling Hills Country Club. The airmen among the onlookers knew that if a swell upside-

down flyer like this pilot had taken care to right his ship for the next stunt—then the next stunt was going to be very good.

Sixty-six came down until you'd guess it was going smack into the ski-run hill. It was coming down the run again. The few skiers thereon had flattened themselves to the snow. At the ski-way's hop-off hump, 66 humped too. It went right up and through a loop, then came back down to the ski-run's snow again. Coming off the ski-way's lower end, 66 seemed to slither all the way across the ice-rink pond. From the pond, it zoomed. It zoomed between the judges' stand on the racing oval and the clubhouse's veranda; and in that zoom a wingtip ripped the telephone wires from the club's east cornice. Then 66 carried on east, right down on the trees again, headed for Federal, fifteen miles away.

BRIG. GEN. PAUL P. PATCH, M.C., retired, was yelling again. He was in good voice. "66!" he said. "And it was 99! 66, and it's Navy's!" Then he said it was deceptive. That Navy was deceptive, fraudulent, given to sharp practices and number-switching. "Dam' the dam' Navy! 99! 66!"

Old Paul P. turned and stamped into the club lounge.

While all hands followed, Murphy, again talking through the side of his mouth, said, "I think he's calling signals against Navy this time."

Then, with Navy, Air Corps and N.A.A.B. seated in humble submission, Brig. Gen. Paul P. Patch paced that lounge floor and harangued them. Never before had he lost a ski event to an airplane. Never before had he lost a fancy-skating contest to an airplane. Never before had he lost the snowshoe cross-country race to an airplane—nor wound up with his head in a fox hole. And never before had he finished a pung race like a kid's toy on the shelf the day after Christmas.

In the end he was a pacing, hard-blown, bug-eyed madman. Almost wordless, too. But not so wordless, nor thoughtless, that he couldn't finally swing on Commander Nashfield and yell, "Well, what are you going to do about it—sit there like a bump on a log? Why the devil don't you get Navy's Federal headquarters on the phone and learn who that so-and-so is? Have him put under arrest. Do something!"

"Yes, sir," Commander Nashfield winced, getting up and starting for the desk. Then somebody remembered that the culprit 66 had taken down the club's telephone wires. And then old Paul P. announced they'd drive over to the navy hangars in person.

It was more than an hour later that three cars—Navy, Air corps and N.A.A.B. —whirled to a slush-tossing stop before Navy Air's Federal Proving Ground headquarters; and into Commander Nashfield's office went the group—with old Paul P. still cussing and calling for action.

Commander Nashfield took up his phone and called his officer in charge of operations, out in test hangar.

The listening group heard the commander say, "Hello, Captain Ailes. This is Nashfield. . . . Say, who had the Merriam job, No. 66, in the air about an hour ago? . . . Oh! Is that so? . . . What? Gone? . . . Oh, hell. All right. By-by."

Slowly Nashfield turned to old Paul P. "I have bad news, sir," he said. "Our bird has flown. Flown for the last time—here at Federal. The pilot was a young Lieutenant Mandeville. He was making his anchors-aweigh hop, his farewell flight with Navy. He took his discharge today. His orders were in his pocket at the time we saw him. And now, sir, he's even departed this base."

"Mandeville—!" old Paul began to say, then he stopped. His eyes were full of hate. His heart too. He fought for control, and won out to an extent where he was able to turn, face Major Bent, and say, "Come, Bent. Let us drive over to Air Corps' reservation. Navy, bah!"

Showing How Legends Grow in the Foreign Legion

THE REPEATER

By GEORGES SURDEZ

THERE are many officers in the North African Army who still profess to believe that Richard Aubert was a conceited fellow, ambitious and selfish, greedy for publicity and decorations, ready to sacrifice his comrades to get all the credit. That is natural, for in the French Foreign Legion as elsewhere, some men become envious of those more fortunate and resent swift, brilliant success.

As proof that Aubert did not spare his best friend when their interests clashed, they point out certain facts: that he got a citation through sub-lieutenant Murzon's bad luck, that he later wedged into a venture started without him. Then they revive the old rumor that Aubert even attempted to steal the poor chap's fiancée. They are prompt to confess that the wonder of it is that he failed. For the dashing lieutenant was very much of a ladies' man, tall and dark, sinewy, broad without massiveness, as much at ease on a dance-floor as a master of ceremonies.

When Aubert joined the Field Battalion of the Foreign Legion at Dar-Makhzen, in the hills, just before the beginning of the campaign against the Marmushas and allied tribes, little was known of him. It

was evident at once that he had a private income, for his uniforms had been cut in Paris and his boots came from London.

His high, rather narrow face was tanned —from tennis, some hinted immediately— and, with that high-bridged, aristocratic nose, had an expression of carelessness, self-confidence, almost of scorn. As one of his new colleagues expressed it on the spot, "He looks rather like a horse, but a classy nag, a supercilious thoroughbred. Dames love that type."

He joined the battalion mess, naturally, and Jolibois, the president and manager, a round, active little chap, instantly took a dislike to him. Others shared his opinion. Possibly, it was with the worst intentions that he was assigned to the Third Company, commanded by Captain Dornaci, the Corsican.

It was believed that between the foppish, languid newcomer of twenty-six and the middle-aged, hard-boiled ranker, an explosion was due inside a week.

Legionnaires are clannish, and many resented the fact that Aubert's appearance from the outside had prevented, probably, Murzon's promotion to a full lieutenancy. Aubert took up his duties and nothing much happened. When Dornaci was probed concerning him, the thick-set captain replied, "I like him. Fancy pants, right— but a man inside of them. His business to dress as he wants."

As for Murzon, who had the most reason to dislike him, he was delighted. "I remember him from school, you know. He was a year ahead of me. Piles of money, good connections. Could be appointed where he likes. But he comes where there is action."

"We're all flattered," Jolibois agreed sarcastically.

He declared to the others that you could not expect anything else from Murzon. The sub-lieutenant thought along straight lines. He was big, pink and good-natured. A pat on the back, a friendly word, and he was as devoted as a hound. It was a shame, all agreed, the ease with which Aubert won him over.

INSIDE three days, Murzon was aping his mannerisms, tilting his képi on the side of his head in as close imitation of the original as he could achieve on that big, round, pumpkin-like head of his. Very soon, an episode revealed how completely Aubert had blinded him. It happened in the mess-room, at lunch, when Jolibois said that the cook had been a famous chef in a magnificent hotel on the Azure Coast.

"That may be so," Aubert agreed, indicating the slice of meat on his plate, "but I understand why he ended out here. He turns beef into vulcanized rubber."

The mess-president resented that. He was as proud of his cook as a housewife of her home. Furthermore, Aubert seemed to hint that he had never known good cooking. Few things are more infuriating to a Frenchman. Aubert shrugged, refused to argue, and soon excused himself and left.

"Oh, my dears," Jolibois aped his tone perfectly, "how can I live without peacocks' tongues? And the people one has to mix with in the army nowadays! Dreadful, dreadful! Uncouth!" He took breath. "I suppose we all realize that he high-hatted this whole gang."

"Cut that out, Jolibois," Murzon slapped his fist on the table. "Two others kicked about the roast today, and you took it. Aubert can't open his mouth around here." He stammered and his color deepened: "I don't think it's good taste to knock a man just because he is new and you don't happen to like his face."

Jolibois bristled at once.

"I suppose you'll teach me manners?"

"If I have to, yes, *mon lieutenant.*"

There was an instant's silence. Murzon had used the military title, deliberately, to show something or other stirring in his brain. He had a single gold stripe around his cuffs, Jolibois had two. That made things awkward in a personal difference.

The mess-president hesitated, then lifted his shoulders helplessly after glancing at the others for sympathy.

"When that guy does you a couple of dirty tricks, Murzon, you'll change your tune. He'll see that you get all the dirty jobs, but even at that, he won't stick with us. He'll transfer back to whichever nursery for conscripts he escaped from. He's no Legionnaire. Let's drop it and check in three months."

Three months later, almost to the day, when the Taza Mobile Group camped in the far south to recuperate, after marching hundreds of miles over hills and through ravines, fighting four major engagements, a dozen skirmishes, Lieutenant Aubert was summoned to the center of the great square formed by the assembled troops. Bugles blew, drums rolled, bayonets glistened in long, rigid rows, nude sabres swept and flashed in salutes.

The adjutant read in a stentorian voice.

"Aubert, Richard, Lieutenant, Field Battalion of Legion. Has given constant proof of superb calm, great energy, fine leadership and cool courage. Wounded in the right arm, cited a first time, refused evacuation to the hospital. Volunteered four separate times for dangerous duties. The present citation carries the award of the Colonial War Cross with palms."

It was known also that the general commanding had asked for the Legion of Honor for Aubert. And Murzon, who had been in the Legion for four years, boasted only a battalion citation on his cross-ribbon, a single "nail." Yet he was as brave, as capable as Aubert, all knew. But his luck was poor—he did not do things in spectacular fashion.

JOLIBOIS and his clique were furious. No one could deny that Aubert was a fine officer and had courage. But his genuine daring, his eagerness for action, were another grievance. It seemed offensive to some that a man with money, a handsome face and brains should prove as reckless with life and limbs as Second-Class Legionnaire Otto Schmidt, ex-farm hand brought up in an orphanage.

They grew weary of Murzon's singing Aubert's praise. They grew annoyed that the new man had won definite ascendancy in the company, in the battalion, that the

sergeants, the Legionnaires, even Old Dornaci, liked and admired him. All merely because Aubert did things in a flashy style, showed in combat what is called color in sports.

"He's a swell guy," Murzon proclaimed, "a swell guy! A born officer, a chief. In his blood, you know; he's serving under only one of his names. His father's on the general-staff, one of his uncles——"

"Put two and two together, sucker," Jolibois interrupted him. "Sure, his father is Aubert d'Aubigné, on the general-staff. And don't you think that the general here knows that it won't hurt him to sign his name at the bottom of a citation for the son? With his pull, you'd be a captain."

Murzon sputtered with loyalty.

"Dornaci gave him his first citation," he cried, "and do you think Dornaci can be reached? The Old Man'd tell the Minister of War to go to hell, if he tried to get a man in his company cited out of turn."

"You sap," Jolibois concluded.

Aubert had sensed that several of the younger officers in the battalion did not like him. This had happened often in his life, so he realized that there must be some fault in him. But he was sensitive,

unwilling to surrender. He knew that he irked them by certain remarks, wanted their friendship, yet was tempted always to show them he did not care. He resented the efforts made to detach Murzon from him. He had become very fond of the big chap, admired his courage, his ability. And he was a bit embarrassed by his own luck. Yet, what could he do?

His best intentions went for nothing.

For instance, he was suspected of being conceited, vain. But tradition had it that he must treat the mess to champagne to celebrate his citations. In the smallest detail, he was up against it. If he purchased too much champagne, he would be showing off his wealth. If he based himself on what others did, he would be accused of being miserly.

What annoyed him most was that the gathering, instead of kidding him as was done ordinarily, was serious. No one said jokingly, "Well, you hog, you certainly know how to yank the blanket your way!" Or even, "A new pair of pants should go with that cross." In the name of all, Jolibois complimented him with set phrases, banal words that sounded as if lifted from the citation itself.

HE GREW to dislike them all, those who were friendly with those who barely covered their sarcasm. Murzon, with his wide, blue, worried eyes, annoyed him. The poor fellow was fretting, fearing to show envy or jealousy—which he did not feel and was expected to feel. When the champagne ran low, he ordered more loudly.

"My favorite brand is not carried by the traders with this expedition," he said quietly. "So I had to compromise." They thought him a snob, and he was unwilling to try to end that impression. He sought no favors. "Nevertheless, I am sure you will not mind. On this occasion, champagne is symbolic and traditional, no more. This has pretty labels and it fizzes."

He was satisfied by their reaction to this. They understood him perfectly well—he was hinting, broadly, that they could not tell the difference. Jolibois, who was as touchy as a boil and as proud as a peacock, grew white. He loved to boast that he spent his leaves in Nice, in Monte-Carlo, that he and the titled women he associated with literally swam in champagne.

He swallowed hard, toyed with the knife in his hand, then spoke evenly. "You're right, old man. Champagne is something in a bottle, courage is something in a citation. There are brands and brands."

Aubert smiled, lifted his glass. "Exactly!"

Later, when he was returning to his tent, which he shared with Murzon, the sub-lieutenant grasped his elbow.

"You know, Richard, you shouldn't—shouldn't antagonize them. Best guys in the world. Known them for years. They'll like you if—"

Aubert freed himself gently. He turned, rested one hand on the other's shoulder. He said, rather haughtily, "My dear fellow, I think they're all splendid. Do me a favor? Drop it and don't talk like a damn fool."

Aubert was glad when the campaign resumed after a rest of a week. The battalion mess was somewhat disrupted by the various assignments given its members, the officers were too occupied with their work, or too tired from marching, to look for trouble. The Marmushas were fighting hard enough to make things interesting, there was the constant spice of danger to weigh down the spirits.

Aubert liked Dornaci, because the captain was interested in nothing, in no one, outside the Legion. As soon as he had discovered that Aubert was willing and able to do his job, that his ways did not irk the rank and file, he had accepted the lieutenant on a footing of equality. He was not awkward, tactful or stiff about it, either. He said what he thought.

For instance, one morning when Aubert showed up with a brand new képi

taken from his trunk, perhaps a bit too elegant for the field, Dornaci eyed the headgear with amusement in his tiny, black eyes. "Pretty, very pretty! Must have been a struggle for you not to pin some nice feathers on it."

Aubert had laughed, and the Corsican had grinned. An orderly, who had overheard, spread the words throughout the company. The Legionnaires smiled broadly whenever they spotted that gorgeous display of scarlet, black and gold.

AT THE first skirmish, the section's wit, a skinny chap from Southern France, shouted the remark he had prepared, probably well in advance. The enemy, firing rapidly and at long range, was not hitting anything.

"The lieutenant's new hat is blinding them! It's unfair warfare, that's what it is!"

They had laughed. Which had not prevented them, some minutes later, from following that képi up a slope. Three of the good fellows had gone to laugh in the ambulance, and one laughed no more. But Aubert's képi was famous throughout the battalion.

"Mountebank, clown!" Jolibois muttered. "He'd do anything to get attention."

As for Murzon, he paid little attention to what was going on around him now. Everybody knew that his mind was elsewhere, because he had told everybody. He had received a letter from his fiancée—she had come to Morocco with her family, was staying in Meknes. Even if he could not return until late in the year, she would remain, living with friends. Murzon, at the least provocation, would produce her picture.

"Not bad, eh? Not the chorus girl type, of course. Serious minded. She reads books. Writes poetry."

"And loves you?" a skeptical friend asked.

"Sure. Known her all her life. We'll get married as soon as I am a full lieutenant. Then I'll transfer to France for a couple of years. Start a family you know. Then I'll come back to the Legion."

And Murzon marched, gave his orders, went under fire, like a man in a trance. The thought that his fiancée, whom he had not seen for two years, was but three hundred short miles away, occupied his mind. The idea that he might be killed never seemed to occur to him.

One afternoon, not four hundred yards from a thicket swarming with native snipers, with bullets clipping the twigs from nearby bushes, he suddenly grasped Aubert's elbow.

The lieutenant was startled, ducked. Murzon hardly smiled.

"Listen, Richard, about my wedding; I want you to be best man, naturally. But the families arranged all that years ago—business partner of her father, you know. And I didn't know you. Just the same, you must get leave and be there. We'll have a swell time. You like good food. Her parents have an old Breton woman for a cook. You should taste her lobster!"

Captain Dornaci's whistle cut short his enthusiasm. But as he trotted to take charge of his section, he turned, smiled and shouted, "Just once—try it!"

Aubert shrugged, smiled and started forward.

As always, with the nearness of danger came that impression that his whole being was concentrated like a ball in the middle of his body, between the belt-buckle and the lowering ribs. As always, there was a queer delight in mastering that physical dread, in showing a calm face to his men, in uttering his orders in a quiet, detached manner.

It was one type of courage. He envied Murzon for his careless, casual valor. The sub-lieutenant just knew he would get through untouched and did not bother thinking about it. Aubert wondered whether he would be as happy as a married man as he evidently hoped he would be.

Probably, because Murzon could convince himself that all things were as he wished them.

AFTER covering fifty yards, Aubert noticed that the soil around him was becoming rougher. Not far ahead there opened a narrow gap between two steep slopes, the mouth of a deep ravine. As he expected, a runner came from the captain, suggesting that he swing his section somewhat to his right, to occupy a ridge of ground, and to stop there, keeping contact with the enemy.

He looked at Dornaci and nodded understanding. The veteran officer did not want to lead his company into that bushy funnel without absolute necessity. He was right, for it was in ignoring such precautions, in keeping on eagerly when the going proved easy, that detachments walked into ambush and death.

Aubert reached the spot assigned, placed his automatic rifles, pointed out likely targets, computed and checked the range with his senior-sergeant. Two Legionnaires unrolled long strips of canvas, markers for the plane flying overhead.

Then he squatted, smoking a cigarette. There was no sense in standing exposed to bullets. The Legionnaires with him settled as comfortably as they could, some of them even appeared to drop off to sleep, head resting on their arms, perfectly relaxed. The automatics fired at long intervals, much as a dog barks to show that he is alert, on the watch.

Nothing to do except to wait for developments, orders.

There was shooting, of course, a lot of shooting. Occasionally, the firing would spread angrily, break into fierce fusillade. That did not necessarily mean anything, Aubert had discovered. Firing is contagious, and a nervous man can turn loose an entire battalion, waste thousands of cartridges to no purpose.

Fifteen minutes, twenty. In the seconds that dragged out in silence, from time to time it was odd to hear the buzzing of flies. Then the captain's whistle blew stridently, and Aubert saw his chief gesturing for him to draw back. As he had seen no runner coming from the rear, the lieutenant knew that Dornaci was ordering a withdrawal on his own intitiative. He must have a good reason for that, as he was not precisely a timid man.

"Come on, up—fall back fifty metres," he called.

As he trotted behind his men, he looked around. And saw what the captain had seen; mountain warriors were dropping down one of the slopes, in groups of four or five. They moved very swiftly, were hard to spot, but once spotted, their intention was clear—as soon as they had gathered enough men, they would try to throw the company's line into confusion—and be reinforced, very quickly, by comrades now hiding in the ravine.

The Moroccans knew that surprise had failed at the moment when they saw the Legionnaires move back. As there was no longer need for concealment, they all howled at once. It was a sort of fearsome shrill whoop, impossible to describe. But it was not a pleasant sound.

Within fifteen seconds, they were firing their repeating carbines into the line of retirement. Answering fire broke from the sections. It is difficult, even for perfectly disciplined soldiers, to walk away without firing a few shots.

"Don't let go like that," Aubert called. "Aim your shots—aim lower—"

He found it hard to keep himself steady. Going forward was one thing, backward was another. And, unavoidably, there was some confusion. Men from other sections, from Dornaci's, from Murzon's, were appearing very near. And the bullets were whining all around, pattering on the ground, cracking through bushes. At last, the captain lifted his arm, lowered it, palm down.

"Halt—turn—" Aubert's mind was working coolly again. "Cease firing!" He

paused a second. "Automatic, at will! Riflemen, volley fire! Two cartridges; ready—aim, fire! Aim—fire!" The first volley was somewhat ragged, the one after crashed out like one shot, at the exact order. That was what he had sought, he had

his men in hand: "Fire at will—pick your targets. Fire—"

And he grinned; nothing like doing something altogether to remind men that they were a unit, not isolated individuals. One of his men was on his feet, trailing his rifle in his left hand. The right arm hung limp, and Aubert could see long drops of blood dripping from the nerveless hand into the dirt.

He walked behind his skirmish line. And he saw a young sergeant, Labauche, from Murzon's section. The fellow was directing the fire of an automatic. Aubert tapped him on the shoulder.

"What are you doing here?"

"Sent here, *mon Lieutenant.* Lieutenant Murzon sent us ahead, telling us to bear to the left, and that he'd join us. Two men were helping him—"

"Helping him? What was the matter? Wounded?"

"I don't know, Lieutenant. He was limping bad."

AUBERT looked in the direction where he had last observed Murzon's section, before the retirement. Nothing much to be seen, save moving *gandouras* and the leaves of the bushes behind which the snipers were hiding. He looked up and down the line. Nowhere could he spot Murzon's képi!

And that was the way it happened, he thought foolishly. You suddenly became aware that a comrade was missing, then you picked up his headless body a few hours later! Murzon was somewhere on his left, probably wounded, with only two men. That was clear. What should be done?

"Listen, Sergeant—" he knelt, and motioned to the gunners to keep on firing while he spoke to the non-com—"try to think straight. When Lieutenant Murzon told you to bear left, did he mean left facing forward or going back? See, I mean, did he mean the left of our company's front, or your own left as you retired?"

The young sergeant's jaw fell and muscles in his cheeks started to quiver. He was beginning to realize that he might have misunderstood. And, instantly, Aubert was sure. Murzon had meant the left of the advancing line, not the left of the retreating line. By now, he and his two companions were probably looking in vain for the others, two hundred and more yards away. Proof again that no officer should ever give an order subject to interpretation.

Aubert looked toward Dornaci. The captain was quite a distance away. The time to gallop to his side, to explain, to get orders, to assign men, and five or ten minutes would have passed, it would be too late. Yet, did he, Aubert, have the right to act independently, to leave his assigned post, even in an attempt to rescue a colleague?

He did not think for two seconds, yet a hundred conflicting thoughts swirled through his brain. He might be blamed for deserting his place; yet he might be blamed for not doing anything. Men would be sure to say that, showing off as he had, he had done it to help a comrade in an emergency! But what in hell did he care what Jolibois and his clique would say?

What mattered was that Murzon was in danger and must be helped.

"Brauner!"

The senior-sergeant lumbered up to him. "Lieutenant?"

"I'm taking four men and going to look for Lieutenant Murzon. He's isolated somewhere on our left. You're in charge. Inform the captain as soon as I am off. Try to keep a couple of automatics going to cover me—"

"Understood, Lieutenant." Brauner raised his voice. "Four riflemen to go with the lieutenant."

The reply was immediate. The nearest four left the firing line. Aubert started off with long strides. He knew he could trust Brauner to handle everything well. In fact, the automatics' fire was so intense and so precise that he and his followers were covered for more than a hundred yards. Then scattered missiles started to nose around in the air for them.

"Murzon! Murzon! Damn it, where are you?"

He stumbled on round pebbles, crashed into bushes, swung around boulders. It was a nightmare dash through the fusillade. And the mad thought kept surging: poor economy—losing two officers in trying to save one! But, damn it, you couldn't be cold-blooded about this business, not all the time. He was doing right, Murzon was his friend, his only friend here—he couldn't stand by and let his throat be cut.

HE STOPPED for breath, caught a glance over his shoulder of the sweaty, dirty faces of the four Legionnaires, mouths open, panting and tense. What did they think? They had no choice —they lived or died according to his decisions.

"Over there, Lieutenant," one of them said, indicating.

They were running very close to the enemy now, the detonations seemed to crash out in their ears. One had the illusion of heat when the bullets went by. Twenty yards further, Aubert, came on a grim group in a shallow depression between two rows of bushes.

A Legionnaire was standing, holding his rifle ready. Around his head, tied from chin to skull, was a dingy cloth. His jaws were a red, bleeding mess. Murzon was on the ground, and another private was kneeling above him, holding on to his wrist with both hands. This chap had been wounded also—a patch of dark red was spreading through the cloth of the tunic, on the right side.

"No, Lieutenant, no, no—" he was pleading in a gasping voice.

"Get going, get going—"

"No—"

Aubert saw everything at once, understood everything. Murzon had a revolver in his hand—he wanted to shoot himself, so that the other two could leave him. Aubert had always smiled at such tales, skeptically. It seemed over-heroic, a parade of self-sacrifice. Yet, as he saw it with his own eyes now, it was most natural. What else was there to do? The Legionnaires couldn't leave a man behind alive, to be tortured. And no man with army training could fail to offer them a chance for life.

He knocked the weapon from Murzon's hand.

"You two go," he said to the Legionnaires. "We'll get him back. Bear toward the left—where we came from."

The man wounded in the side released Murzon's wrist. He looked around for his rifle, picked it up and started away. Murzon was shouting incoherently, swearing, urging Aubert to leave, that there was no need for all of them to be killed for him. He was partly hysterical. Once a man has reached the spot where he is ready to blow his brains out, he often is a trifle upset.

"Where are you hit? How badly?" Aubert asked.

He could hear shots very close. The men he had brought were keeping off prowlers. Murzon did not answer, kept shouting for

him to leave. So Aubert swung his arm, struck him with the flat of his hand. "Snap out of it, you idiot! I don't want to kill you picking you up. Where are you hit?"

Murzon seemed to awaken. His eyes cleared, he almost grinned.

"Not even hit. I slipped and wrenched my knee. Can't stand."

Aubert started to laugh, nervously.

"Why the hell didn't you say so? You—Nardo—"

"Lieutenant?" the Legionnaire automatically straightened, grounded the rifle he had been firing, with the butt close to his right toe.

"Sling that gun and lift on the other side—" Aubert ordered. "You're pretty strong, aren't you?"

"Like a bull, Lieutenant." The man grinned. "All to muscle, nothing to brain."

"You're lucky. All right—*ho-hisse!* Up he comes."

They had Murzon erect between them, holding his right leg high. And they started running lumberingly, like a queer, five legged animal. It made the oddest broken rhythm that Aubert had ever heard, the heavy pounding of the Legionnaire's hobnails, the slap-slap of his own boots and the muffled impact of Murzon's one good foot at irregular intervals.

IT WAS comic and sinister at the same time. The pull of the wounded man's arms around their necks brought Aubert and Nardo almost nose to nose. Then the Legionnaire had an idea, and lifted up Murzon's sound leg, so that they carried him.

This was better for some five or six strides, then the sub-lieutenant's solid two hundred pounds asserted themselves.

They sweated and they swore. They fell, scrambled up again, reaching for an arm, for a leg. The three other Legionnaires hovered near, stopping to fire, trotting to catch up again. And the natives, who had realized the plight of the group, started to close in.

Murzon was half-crying, "I'm sorry. Trouble to you—"

"Shut up," Aubert urged.

"'T's all right, Lieutenant, don't worry," Nardo protested, gaspingly.

They overtook the two wounded Legionnaires. The one with the shattered jaw was hauling the other, who seemed about to drop, by his belt. The sun was murderously hot, they were all furiously thirsty. There was no longer time, there was no longer space. Just a swirl of heat and dust, of explosions and shouts. Somewhere ahead, at an impossible distance, was the Legion's line and safety.

Aubert heard voices all around him, speaking French, speaking German. The wounded men grunted and groaned as they trotted. When his hurt leg struck the ground or a stone, Murzon would shudder and yelp. The lieutenant saw as if through a red mist.

Quick movements nearby, thuds, an outcry.

"You would—you fool—did you see him?"

"Keep going, keep going—"

"Easy there—you're yanking me apart."

"Keep going—keep going—going——"

They had to drop Murzon once, to defend themselves. The ground was sweating up naked, swarthy, hairy men. Aubert clubbed at them with the barrel of his pistol. In a mêlée such as this, luck ruled, not strength, nor skill. The whole front of his tunic was ripped off by a clawing hand. For several seconds, shaven skulls and supple, brown backs, protruding eyes and grinning teeth were everywhere. Then they were gone again, and that was all.

Murzon was lifted again. He was bleeding from a gash on his chin. And he was howling about someone kicking him in the face with a hobnailed boot. He was as squirmy as a bucket of eels and as heavy as his volume in pure lead. Aubert now detested him as cordially as he had liked him. The fool seemed to be making things harder on purpose!

And it was Nardo, the good Legionnaire, the disciplined soldier, who now addressed a crippled superior. "Shut up, will you shut up!"

Suddenly, there was even more noise, new silhouettes appeared, closed on them. But they wore the little képis and the whitish tunics. Aubert released Murzon and sat down, closed his eyes. He was nauseated, weak.

A hand rested against his back, something metallic touched his lips. "Take a swig of this, Lieutenant," said Brauner's voice. There was a deep, joyous chuckle as Aubert swallowed greedily. "Good, eh? Now, some water—"

Aubert rose to his feet, his mind clearing. There were Legionnaires around him, Legionnaires ahead, between him and the enemy. Many of the faces were unfamiliar.

"Another company's here?" he asked.

"The whole damn battalion, Lieutenant."

Aubert realized that he should have known it from the sounds. The four companies were sweeping through the ravine. And a machine gun company was in action somewhere very near. Four of the weapons hammered at once.

HE FELT the air sweeping across his naked chest, sought for the buttons on his tunic — and discovered that he no longer wore a tunic. The cloth hung in shreds from his belt. He looked for Murzon and saw him, stretched on the ground not ten yards away, with two ambulance men working on him.

The leg of his breeches had been cut away, and his knee protruded, livid, swollen like a melon. Probably a dislocation. Then Aubert noticed that Brauner had vanished, that he was standing aimlessly among wounded men and stretcher-bearers. He was tired and breathless, but unhurt. His job was at the front.

He overtook his section rapidly, touched Brauner on the shoulder. The senior-sergeant turned, grinned and sketched a salute; Aubert was in charge once again. He repeated the orders from the captain, carried on.

And he was puzzled to see that his Legionnaires looked back at him frequently and smiled.

He was unaware of his appearance. Those who envied his usual elegance, the chic of his uniforms, might have been mollified now. He was bareheaded, face and chest smeared with a dark muddy stuff, where blood had mixed with dust and dirt. Only one of his sleeves was left, and he finally yanked it free and tossed it away.

During a pause, while sweeping the Chleuhs out of the ravine, Captain Dornaci strode over.

"You're a lucky swine, Aubert," he said. "I don't remember your asking my permission."

The younger man scanned the massive, sunburnt face, looked at the tiny, metallic eyes in the maze of wrinkles. You could never be sure that the captain was kidding. Best not to take a chance.

"There was no time, Captain."

"No time, no time," Dornaci grumbled. "Where would we go to if we all reasoned that way? No discipline." But it was manifest that he was rather pleased than otherwise. For he did something he did very rarely—he offered the lieutenant one of his cigarettes. "Don't do it again. And, by the way, as soon as you get a chance, get some clothing. An officer shouldn't look like a chimney-sweep."

IT WAS six months later, two hundred miles northward, that Aubert realized that the rescue of Murzon had brought him more than his third citation.

The Riff war had started, and the battalion had been transferred to combat the hordes which had recently annihilated Spanish armies. This was almost like a European war. Well organized, well led, armed with good weapons for the majority, the Riffi performed astonishing feats. Au-

bert was slated for a change soon, on the list for a company of his own.

His captain was still Dornaci, the sub-lieutenant was still Murzon. But of late, Murzon had been sullen, and had done a

strange thing—insisted on having his own tent. He did not talk to Aubert except in the line of duty, avoided being seated near him at mess. Jolibois, who had done very well in the campaign and now displayed the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor, seemed his most intimate friend.

That evening, in his tent, Aubert was writing a final letter which he hoped would end a misunderstanding. The crackling of rifles along the front line, three kilometers away, was continuous. The enemy was holding back the column in which the company served, and to impress the French fired a few shells from a field-gun, captured from the Spaniards, at long intervals. The gunners, either captured men forced to their task or deserters without training, got very poor results. But the effect on the morale of the Moroccans was strong; they were using artillery.

The lieutenant found the letter difficult to compose. He had torn up a dozen sheets. With his background and his education, he was unprepared to write brutally to a woman.

Yet he knew that he had not been at fault, not once. But how could he make that clear, to the girl, to Murzon, and to the officers who made a show of avoiding him?

After the campaign against the Marmushas, the battalion had gone to Meknes for a long rest. And, naturally, as Murzon was convalescing in that city after four weeks in the hospital, Aubert had looked him up. In the normal course of things, he could not avoid being introduced to Murzon's fiancée, Maryse Menaudel. And to her brother, François.

Maryse was a statuesque blonde of twenty, not lacking a certain beauty. Her complexion was superb. But she was an odd, mental type. Aubert had wondered how her delicate sentimentality would match with Murzon's robust, headlong habits. Murzon admired her for her passion for poetry, for painting, for music. But he saw no reason for himself to lose much time talking about them. He much preferred to start out with the brother, a lad of twenty-two, just through his military service, to play tennis, to ride, or to hunt.

And with the candor peculiar to him, he told Aubert:

"Look here, old man, you have all those things at your fingers' tips. You sort of hang around her a bit—keep her interested. No, I'm not jealous—known her all her life. You can even try to flirt a bit with her, if you like." Murzon had laughed confidently. "I have to take the kid, François, around a bit." He winked. "And what he wants to see isn't what she likes. You have nothing much to do, so be a good guy and help out."

AUBERT obediently had become Maryse's attendant. Not that he liked the task. Murzon had taken a lot for granted when he had said that Aubert had nothing else to do. Aubert's family had a great many friends among high officials in the colonial administration, in the army. But they were as far apart from Maryse's world as if they had belonged to a different race. Most of the women were married, older, and rather irked by the girl's constant interest in books, music and art.

They listened without enthusiasm, and Maryse, with the intolerance of youth, soon made remarks openly about their frivolous

pursuits. Aubert found that mixing her with his friends was like mixing whipped cream and vinegar. It didn't work out very well.

"How's your intellectual heifer?" someone would ask him.

Aubert also realized that a number of the younger officers took a great delight in suspecting him of the worst intentions. When he chanced to eat at mess, which was seldom, Jolibois or someone else would be sure to ask news of Maryse.

"Smart boy, Aubert; a lot of money goes with her. Well, in this world, it's every man for himself."

It was a fact that Maryse's father had a large fortune, which he had made during the war on food products. And it was known that Aubert, although supplied with a sizable income, would not inherit much as he was the last of five sons. He found himself in a false position and tried to make Murzon understand this.

"Maryse doesn't enjoy being with my friends," he explained. "And I can't very well take her out alone."

"Why not?" Murzon opened his eyes widely." In America, in England, young girls go out with young men and nothing is thought of it. Be modern, you ancestor-worshipper!"

"But what will people say?"

"That from you, Richard?" Murzon laughed loudly. "Well, let them talk. After all, if I say it's all right, whose business is it? Say, you're not falling in love with her, are you?"

"No," Aubert said. He could not speak what was in his mind—that he was tired of listening to poetry, that he would sooner have danced with a number of ladies he knew. You could not criticize a man's fiancée to his face. And you could not tell him, either, of the long, silent, dangerous pauses in conversations. "Raoul, I don't understand why you yourself won't spend more time with Maryse. After all, you love her; you were always talking—"

"I'll be married to her for life," Murzon said, grinning. "And it's no infatuation, it's love, from the time we were kids. To tell the truth, I'm burying my bachelor's life. And François certainly is having a good time!"

"Maybe too good a time. He doesn't look so well."

"He is tougher than he looks."

Failing with Murzon, Aubert tried with Maryse. He made it clear to her that he was embarrassed at being seen with her so much, when her financé was in town. She said nothing, just looked at him a long time, half-smiling. And when he did not call the next afternoon, she sent a messenger with an invitation. Aubert had gone out for a long ride by himself, and was at mess when the Moorish lad delivered the small, scented envelope. He was at mess because he was afraid of running into Maryse in any one of the good restaurants.

He turned the note over, wrote with a pencil on the back, giving an excuse—duty at the barracks. And the native boy left. Jolibois smirked.

"Once you get a fish hooked, you play it a while," he said, blowing cigarette smoke toward the ceiling.

"You talk like an ass, Jolibois."

"Do I, really? We'll see." He shrugged. "There's a pool on, the number of weeks before she breaks her engagement. I hope to win—two weeks more. But, if I were you, I'd worry a bit about Murzon. That guy is a fool in some ways, but he is muscular and has violent reactions."

Maryse turned out to be one of those persistent girls. When Aubert failed to show up the next afternoon, she called at the barracks and asked to see him. This might be normal in America or in England, as Murzon had stated, but Frenchmen considered it scandalous. Aubert had to receive her in the company's office, where he was working, then escort her through the military camp to the gateway.

Then he wrote her a letter, explaining that it would be hard for him to see her, as his duties and his private life absorbed

most of his time. The net result was an immediate summons to call at her residence. She received him alone, in a spacious room opening on a terrace, with a superb view of the Native City.

"What's the matter, Richard?" she launched straight to the point. "I refuse to be offended by your letter. I think I guess what prompted it. It's all to your credit." She spread her hands widely. "I too have been puzzled, I too have despaired. Richard!"

"You wrote me that there was something important," Aubert said. "May I know what it is?"

"You know—us." She came nearer and reached for one of the gilt buttons on his tunic." Richard, Richard—you need not be afraid. You may speak to me."

Aubert was red, embarrassed. The rôle of Joseph is not a welcome one for a subaltern of the Foreign Legion, the finest infantry on earth. Fortunately, they were interrupted at the critical moment where he would have had to make an answer, "to speak to her" as requested. Murzon and brother François tumbled into the room, laughing and cavorting. Both were very tall, very massive lads, and they mauled Aubert playfully.

Neither of them noticed his relief, neither of them noticed that Maryse's usually calm glance was blazing murderously in their direction. They had gone into the country, they yelped, and what a time they had had. Model farm—they had seen all the cows, and had drunk all the milk. And they winked, they nudged!

"You're a pair of drunken idiots," Maryse said, and swept out.

Aubert shook the two off very quickly. He went to see Captain Dornaci.

"Would it be possible for me to arrange for immediate leave for a few days, Captain? I must go to Casablanca—"

"What for?" Dornaci challenged.

"Family business, Captain."

"Um—family business? Right. Go ahead. I'll fix it."

Aubert left that same evening for Casa. There he waited for his official leave, and dodged southward, to Mogador. From Mogador to Marrakesh, where he remained a week. He was afraid to go back to Meknes, but had to when his furlough expired. When he reached his apartment in town, where he would change before going to the barracks, there was a letter waiting for him, evidently delivered by hand, as it had no stamp. He knew the writing. He laid it in a brass ash tray, poured alcohol from a lighter upon it, struck a match.

The paper was still smouldering when someone rapped hard on his door. He opened, and found François Renaudel standing outside. The lad shoved by him, slammed the door, and stood in the middle of the floor, his fists bunched.

"I'm going to have a talk with you, and you won't like it, Aubert. Of all the rotten, cheap games—"

"Suppose you tell me quietly?" Aubert suggested. "What's wrong?"

"She's left—and she's broken with Murzon. Do you realize what you've done? Our families have been friends for thirty years—but if you think my father won't be informed about you—"

"Your sister has left Meknes?" Aubert smiled. He was not too worried about handling François. "And what gives you the idea that I was concerned with her departure and her disposal of her plans for the future?"

"Oh, you're sly. She didn't say anything directly about you. But she wrote Murzon that she now knew what a gentleman was, a man who sacrificed the things dearest to him for honor. That's you, I suppose. That was a fine play, that leaving."

"Did Murzon send you here?" Aubert asked.

"No. He said he wants nothing done. That you saved his life — and that you warned him to stop things. He is the grandest chap in the world. He'll take it on the chin, and say nothing. Because he liked you." François loomed big and men-

acing. "But I came here; you can't get away with it—"

Aubert was growing furious. The threat of physical violence always had that effect. "And what do you intend to do?"

"Uh?"

"You came here to give me a licking, didn't you?"

"Yes—and—"

"You're a dirty-minded, presumptious kid. Now, get out before I apply my boot in the proper place." Aubert opened the door. "Get out!"

François possibly had expected a cringing, abject victim. In any case, he hesitated. But he would not suffer the humiliation of being thrown out like an annoying beggar, and launched his big fist toward Aubert's face. He was big and a fairly good athlete. But Aubert, from the age of six, had fenced, mounted horses, boxed. It was an execution rather than a fight.

In fifteen seconds, François' eyes were blackened, his lips lacerated. A hard drive to the stomach knocked him off his feet. And he sat down heavily, his big arms lunging into space ludicrously, still trying to contact solidity. Aubert hoisted him upright by the collar of his coat, pushed him through the door, swung his foot heartily.

"I always keep a promise," he concluded.

He washed his bruised hands, grunting with pain and satisfaction.

"That cleared the atmosphere a bit," he remarked aloud.

He had planned to dine in town, but decided he might as well face things immediately. So he went to the mess instead. Jolibois was present, Murzon sat near the end of the long table. No one answered Aubert's greeting, and he sat down in a general silence. He noticed that the orderly looked questioningly at the mess-president before bringing him a plate of soup. There had been talk before he had come, and something was up.

Hardly ten words were spoken during the meal. There was a palpable constraint. Murzon looked at his plate, drank his glass dry every few minutes, said nothing. At the end of the dinner, Jolibois tapped on his saucer with a spoon.

"Gentlemen, I wish to refer to—"

"Don't!"

It was Murzon who had spoken. He was glaring at Jolibois.

"Did you speak, Murzon?"

"Sure, I spoke. You're about to say something damn foolish. This isn't a boarding-school. We're men. If there was anything to be done, I should be the one to do it." His voice grew hoarse for a second, steadied. "Keeping this up would be stupid. Happens all the time. I don't consider my honor sullied, there's nothing for you to stick your nasty nose into, Jolibois."

"Well, there's comradeship involved, a member of this mess—"

"Comrades?" Murzon laughed harshly. "Sure. You're all sore because it's Aubert and not you. Off the field, which one of you hasn't chiseled something from a comrade? There's a guy here, Jolibois, who beat your time with a girl you had in Taghit. What sanction did—"

"She was neither my wife nor my fiancée!"

"But you were the sucker just the same." Murzon shrugged wearily. "An unofficial sucker, but a sucker! You don't like Aubert, and you'd like to mess up things a bit more. As we all understand that, let's forget it." He looked at Aubert. "Come on, Richard, have a drink with me. And the rest of you, too, if you like." He grinned. "The loser buys."

The general opinion was that Murzon had acted like a man and a gentleman. Several colleagues assured Aubert quietly

that even if official blame had been asked against him, they would have voted for him to retain full privileges. Before the evening was over, Aubert had a chance to speak to Murzon privately.

"Raoul, I give you my word of honor there was nothing to——"

"Don't I know that, old man."

"I'm sorry. François came to see me and—"

"He got fresh and you smacked him?" Murzon smiled sadly. "I felt like doing that myself when he wouldn't keep quiet. It hurts, sure. But the two of you are the most decent people I ever have known. Maryse and you. You'll be happy."

"I don't intend—"

"Let's drop it, won't you?" Murzon shrugged, blew his nose. "Well, I'm going out tonight. To celebrate the continuation of my bachelorhood. To wipe the slate and start afresh."

Aubert would have liked to go along. But he decided against suggesting it. Bad taste, he thought. In a short while, the engagement would be resumed, when the families got together, and the whole affair would blow over.

FOR a month, there was one letter each week from Maryse. Aubert, who could guess the contents, burned them. Then there was a letter from Madame Renaudel, rather confused and embarrassed, asking for information. What had happened? Neither her daughter, nor her son, who had recently returned from Morocco, could give her a straight story. She could not understand anything in Murzon's letters, either.

All she knew was that Maryse was greatly upset, and accused her brother of having angered Aubert.

Aubert answered politely, stating that so far as he knew, there was nothing in which he was connected. He knew that Maryse had broken her engagement to Murzon, of course, but could offer no explanations. He hoped against hope that this would end the matter. He felt like a man walking through thick mud, awkward, annoyed.

He welcomed the order that sent the battalion rushing north to the battle front even more than his friends and comrades did. And for a rather long time, he was without news. He had no time to miss letters, at that, for, being a lieutenant, he was not mounted and had to march as far and fast as the Legionnaires. A hundred kilometers in a couple of days, topped off with two or three hours of stiff fighting, rather takes a man's mind off personal troubles. Even Murzon gave proof that throbbing feet take precedence over an aching heart.

For long weeks, Aubert and Murzon slept side by side under one tent. They conversed on casual topics, on matters concerned with their work. Aubert was watching the development of varioús men under strain and danger.

Jolibois, a spiteful little trouble-maker in private life was a very brave officer, and very just with his men. Another lieutenant, popular with commissioned men, was hated by the privates. All had courage—being in the Legion.

By a strange freak of mind, Murzon, who had chided Jolibois for trying to interfere in his business, grew to be fond of his company. But he did not mention the matter again to Aubert until the mail arrived one morning in a bunch. The sergeant who brought in the post, picked the letters out of his pouch, looked at the names, called them out.

"Lieutenant Aubert, Lieutenant Aubert—" the name recurred several times, and four of the envelopes bore a handwriting that Murzon could not fail to recognize. The sub-lieutenant grew gloomier and gloomier. It was an ordeal for him, Aubert realized. So he shoved those letters in his pocket, and opened those from his family.

At the first opportunity, he readdressed Maryse's envelopes and was taking them to the post when Murzon intercepted him. "Listen, Richard, what's the news? Fran-

çois wrote me, but that stupid animal tries to be tactful and there isn't a word about Maryse. After all, I ought to be told—an ordinary courtesy, eh?"

Aubert had the letters in his pocket. He could satisfy Murzon on one point by taking them out, showing them, readdressed and still sealed. But it was a dirty thing to do to the girl, might even work harm to her with Murzon. It seemed cheap for Aubert to underline the fact that he was being pursued against his will.

"No news," he replied.

Murzon looked at him steadily. "You're a liar, Richard. You received several letters. I saw them."

Aubert flushed, grew stubborn.

"I have no news for you, and that's flat."

"So that's the way it is?" Murzon looked at the tip of his cigarette, then his glance wandered over the rows of tent. "Well—I suppose you'll understand if I move my stuff out of your place. I have a strong stomach, Aubert. But there is a limit."

"Do exactly as you please, Murzon."

"Thanks a lot."

DAYS had passed, other marches, other combats. And the mail had overhauled the column once more. And again there were letters for Aubert and none for Murzon. By this time, Aubert had reached a decision. He picked out the envelope bearing the latest post-mark, tore it open.

"Richard: I have received my letters unopened. You probably destroyed the others. I know what holds you. Your foolish soldier's honor, your officer's code. I am sure you will realize how foolish all of that is compared to our love."

He skipped paragraphs, shrugged over some sentimental lines that were reminiscent of poetry he had read, and he laughed angrily at other passages:

"You sat there that evening, so tormented, so brave. Your lips were trembling with the words I was trembling to hear." And again, "You need not fear that you will be considered a fortune-hunter, darling. I shall arrange with father to settle a small income on me, or even live on your army pay. I pray for you all the time, and my love is so strong that it will fend off the bullets of your foes—"

Aubert chuckled and thought, "When she was praying for Murzon, he sprained his knee. I'd better watch out."

But he must stop all of this. If he must be brutal, he would be brutal. That was why he sat alone in his tent, writing on the folding table set up in the center by his orderly. The booming of the field-gun every fifteen minutes punctuated the passing time. In the yellow glow of the candle in its glass cage, the lines sprang on the paper effortlessly now.

Once he had decided on a major operation, he decided to cut deep and clean, and to cauterize at the same time with the very virulence of his protest.

"Mademoiselle—" he wrote, without any other word on the same line. Curt and polite!

"Your youth and inexperience are the only excuse for the embarrassment you have brought upon me. I wish to make it clear that when I was silent it was because I had nothing to say of interest to you, and that if my eyes looked soulful, they betrayed my inner feeling, boredom. We have nothing in common. The often repeated statement that I understand and love poetry is really another barrier between us; I detest to hear it misread, misquoted, misunderstood. It is a genuine suffering, and I remember certain hours with dread and an immense thankfulness that they won't be repeated."

Well, he thought, that should not be easy to forgive.

"I am not afraid of being mistaken for a fortune-hunter. If I were, I would not be in Morocco. Even my humble title should be more valuable overseas, and when I apply my mind to business, I have the intelligence to see that at the prevailing

exchange, it would be better to work for dollars than for francs. A foreign expedition would at least assure me of one thing —if I had to marry a goose to obtain the golden eggs, I would prefer to delude myself with the belief that the woman seemed stupid only because she spoke my language imperfectly. Platitudes and utter banalities have a bit of charm uttered with an accent. But in grammatical French, they are an agony."

Aubert then hesitated. But what was the use of pulling punches?

"It would be impossible for me to marry you even were I in love with you. My family would object strenuously. It is not up to me to discuss here the right or wrong of their objections, of their prejudices, but I do know that I am very much attached to family traditions, respect my father's wishes."

This time, he grinned; that would be a surprise to his father! But a touch of haughty snobbism would help greatly, he was sure. He was tempted to tear up this letter, to start another, gentler. But it was not his first experience with a woman determinedly in love, and he knew that one had to be a cad to cure them. Sometimes one failed even at that!

And had she cared what she was doing to Murzon, to him? To her family? Aubert felt that Maryse was not really in love with him, that she had deceived herself into loving him, because he represented, whether he wished to or not, something a bit different from her people. He was not the snob, she was.

"Richard—"

He looked up, startled; Murzon had lifted the tent flap, had entered. He stood there, above the table, his big body looming high. Before he could control the instinctive movement, Aubert had covered the sheet with a blotter. The sub-lieutenant looked at him sadly.

"You're writing to her?" he asked. Aubert flushed guiltily. Murzon shoved his hands in his pockets. They were trembling. "You told me once that there had been nothing between you. If you told the truth, you can show me that letter. Will you?"

Aubert grew white now. No, he could not show what he was writing, not to this poor fool who was in love. He would have defended that letter from Murzon with his last breath. And he knew what the other would think.

"No," he shook his head; "I don't show my correspondence."

Murzon stood still. Then, and the sight choked Aubert with helpless anguish, he whistled softly, pursing his lips as if to control their twitching. He nodded several times.

"I see. Jolibois told me you were playing your own game and fooling me. I didn't believe him until now. I can't hate you—you pulled me out of that mess, and risked your skin for me. But I wish you'd left me to get my throat cut. That only hurts a second. You know, Richard, if you had handed me that letter, I would not have looked at it. You love her, I know now. Don't bother denying it, lying. The facts are plain."

"Raoul, I swear—"

"You'd swear anything." Murzon looked at a slip of paper in his hand, crumpled it thoughtfully. "Well, I swear that I bear you no grudge. Those things happen. So long."

He turned and bent down to pass out of the tent. He was gone. Aubert angrily tore up the letter. Everything was working against him. He glanced at his watch. He had two hours before the orderly would summon him for his trick on guard. He heard the sounds of men marching, gathering, confused voices, sharp orders. But his own problem absorbed his mind and killed curiosity. He wrote another letter, simple and straight forward.

"So you see," he concluded, "you are causing a man who loves you great pain. I am sure that considering all I have written you, your own heart will dictate your conduct. You may give him what expla-

nation you chose, blame a passing infatuation. That is the truth, and in the end, the truth is best. No man is more capable of seeing the truth than Raoul. As it is, he is so desperate that I am afraid he will do something rash. Write him, reassure him, give him life. And as you have honored me, Mademoiselle, in suspecting me of honor, I give you my word of honor that you will have picked the better man. I feel very humble before Raoul; I know that I could not have shown the dignity and fairness he reveals."

He reread that letter and was satisfied with it. If there was any gentleness, any worth in her character, she would understand. And this time he had written nothing offensive. He poured himself a stiff drink of cognac, lighted a cigarette.

It was up to fate now. His letter would be in France in four days, an answer by airmail would take two. Inside a week, Murzon would have his happiness again—if he were alive. Aubert did not like to remember his face just before he had turned to go. If ever a man had the will to die, Murzon had!

He read an old newspaper until the orderly appeared. It seemed to Aubert that the Legionnaire considered him sulkily, almost reproachfully. It was growing to be a habit, believing that everyone disliked him!

He buckled on his belts, strode out. Then he turned and addressed his man. "There's a letter on the table. Get a stamp and take it to the field-post. A truck might leave in the morning."

"Right, Lieutenant."

The man was sulky, that was sure. Why? Who knew with Legionnaires? They're the moodiest of men. Perhaps he had drunk a bit too much.

He reached the outer trench, where the night shift was on guard. The scattered shots in the distance winked out like fireflies. He found Jolibois waiting for him.

"Hope I'm on time," he said.

"On the dot, Aubert." There was an odd sound to his voice, something new. Irony, sarcasm? "By the way, Murzon left this note for you before he went—"

"Before he went where?"

"Out there—" Jolibois' arm lifted, barely discernible in the darkness, indicating the northeast, the front.

Aubert tore open the small envelope. He crouched in the trench, held the beam of his pocket-torch on the paper.

"If there is any kick, this will clear you. It was the company's turn to supply an officer for special mission. And it was your turn. But after what happened in your tent, I did not speak of it. I told the captain that I had offered to go in your place, and that you had accepted. They saw me go in, come out. I hope I don't come back. I don't intend to. Let me tell you that I feel you don't love her, instinctively. You are too cagey and cold-blooded when she is mentioned. But I put you on your honor to marry her after I die, and to make her as happy as you can. If I die for her, you can live for her. Adieu. Raoul Murzon, sub-lieutenant."

"Here, you might as well read it," Aubert said to Jolibois.

"That changes things, if he didn't tell you," the other said. "You know, I was surprised. I don't like you or anything about you. But you have guts."

"What mission is he on?"

"After that field-gun."

"It's four kilometers inside their lines!"

"All of that. Fourteen men and an officer, grenades and knives. I guess you'll get the girl all right. They may get there, but they'll never come back." Jolibois stood

very straight before Aubert. "Don't grind your teeth, old chap; I'm not afraid of you!"

"I know you're not. You're brave—" Aubert said slowly; "that's what makes you a bit hard to classify." He laughed. "By the way, may I ask you a favor? Thanks. Carry on here while I go to see the captain—he's still up, isn't he?"

"He won't go to sleep while they're out."

"Right." Aubert hurried away. He understood why his orderly had been sulky. The Legionnaire was ashamed that his officer had turned down a dangerous job. This would take a lot of straightening out! He entered the captain's tent.

Dornaci was seated on his blankets, fully dressed, even to the képi on his head. He held his pipe between his fingers, but it had gone out. He had been squatting there, his eyes fastened on the canvas partition, his mind with the special mission detachment. Waiting was often harder than doing for the Corsican. He looked up at Aubert and his face set like brown marble.

"Feeling better?" he asked.

"Maybe you should read this, Captain."

Dornaci looked at the note, and his face lightened.

"I needn't say I feel relieved, Aubert." He indicated a camp stool. "Sit down. Cigarettes here." He seemed to muse for a second, then resumed in a tense voice. "I wish that woman had died at birth! What you damn young fools never think of is that while you're squabbling over—" and Dornaci used the words that came to his mind, "you endanger everyone else. Take Murzon—he is using that job to do away with his life, and to the devil with the fourteen lives trusted to him."

"Captain, I am sure that my colleague will think of them—"

"Sounds like it, doesn't it?" Dornaci waved the note, which he finally returned to Aubert. "And those poor boys will get themselves killed to bring him back, probably." The officer clenched his fists. "If he gets back, how I will reprimand him! Oh, the devil—I won't. No sense to do it—if he gets back."

"What should I do, Captain?" Aubert pressed.

"Do? What is there for you to do?"

"I can't stay here, idle, while he is doing my job. I would like permission to—"

The Corsican lifted his hand swiftly.

"None of that. I command this company, but I obey orders. I think that the raid was foolish, needless. But I could not say so, as my company was due for a job. My orders were to supply an officer and Legionnaires." He half smiled, looked at Aubert steadily. "What you do is on your own."

Aubert stood up. He had his answer.

"Good night, Captain."

"Good luck, Lieutenant."

WHEN Aubert left the French lines a few minutes later, followed by two men, he figured that Murzon and his group had perhaps two hours start of him. At this time, he must be close to the gun's emplacement. Almost any moment, firing might break out ahead, in the darkness. Then the natives would swarm around.

Aubert's margin of safety rested in the probability that they would rush toward the sounds of fighting. Then he would locate the sub-lieutenant and his party. Further than that, he could not plan. But it was clear that for his reputation, for his own conscience, he had to be with those men before they reentered the lines.

Both his companions were volunteers. Fritz, his orderly, and a native of the region, Akli. Fritz had pleaded to come along, saying that it was his duty to follow his "boss." Akli, who served in a *Tirailleur* regiment, had been used as a guide several times before. Each one of the three carried a repeating Lebel carbine, one hundred rounds of ammunition, a revolver and six hand grenades.

Penetrating into hostile territory in African warfare is not difficult. Coming back

is the trick. The three slid through the outposts with ease. They could hear voices, snoring, smell the odor of wood smoke several times. When they were challenged, Akli would reply in dialect, shouting angrily at the top of his lungs. And, this amused Aubert, the others would beg him to lower his voice and not attract bullets.

"They say," Akli informed the lieutenant, "that the damn French must have millions of cartridges, that they shoot at anything. They're not stupid, Lieutenant; they can hear we are only three or four, and now can they think that three or four would be stupid enough to walk around here."

Aubert found it hard to keep his mind wholly on the present. It seemed so easy, so normal. Akli led the way from one path to another so casually that danger appeared remote.

His personal problem worried him. He wanted Murzon to live, of course, because he liked him. But he also wished him to survive to be free of the obligation laid on him in the farewell note.

If Murzon died, Aubert would have to offer to marry Maryse. It was not logical, it would not be sensible, but he would have to try to carry out his late friend's wishes. Of course, having had his letter, she might refuse him. He dropped back to whisper to Fritz:

"Did you mail that letter?"

"No, Lieutenant. Couldn't find a stamp, and as no truck was leaving in the morning, as they told me at the field-post, I—"

"All right, all right."

Well, that was that; she would not have the letter. He could not mail it if Murzon died. And Aubert could not bring himself to make his comrade's sacrifice useless. The strange part of it was that Aubert's father, informed of the circumstances, would be the first to declare it was his son's duty to propose. Human rules, originally created to prevent complications in human relationships, to try to attain a little of justice, had shifted from a means to an end, and led to injustice and complications!

Akli suddenly stretched his arm out, to halt Aubert.

"What's up now?"

"We stop here and wait."

"Why?"

Akli explained in whispers. Night-school in his regiment had given him a good command of French. "We are about where the gun is located. Being only three, so that we could walk very fast, with me speaking the language to the sentries, we got here quick. Lieutenant Murzon and his men are all outsiders, soldiers, and had to go very carefully, passing wide of every outpost. They have not struck yet. If we move around too much now, we may attract attention and cause the undertaking to fail."

"Right." Aubert sat down on the incline leading up from the sunken trail. The others did the same. It was almost comic to sit here in the darkness, as casually as someone waiting for a bus on a city bench. "How will the others locate the gun, Akli?"

"The aviators spotted it. It moves about, but only to three places. The Legionnaires will scout each spot in turn. I could locate it if I had seen the map with the crosses. I wanted to be guide for them, but they said no, all Legion show."

The night was so quiet now, in the midnight lull, the stars were so bright and so near, that Aubert almost forgot himself. He fumbled with a package of cigarettes, then compromised by chewing the tobacco from one of them. His whole body was alive, he seemed to hear, to see, to smell better than ever before. And the grim wonder of it was that a metal pellet no larger than the tip of his little finger, penetrating the proper spot would short-circuit his system, turn him into a hundred and seventy pounds of carrion.

Far off over the French lines two bluish rockets bloomed, after soaring high, side by side. The graceful curves, the shower of sparks had scarcely vanished when a red

flare cut the sky. For thirty seconds, a brace of machine guns hammered away. Then silence came again.

"Listen," Akli said, grasping Aubert's arm.

It was a very faint murmur, a party of men on the march. Quite a distance away.

"The Legionnaires," the native said.

"How do you know?"

"Riffi would talk this far inside the lines."

Akli rose and led the way toward the sound.

Four or five minutes later there was a shout in the distance, which broke off short. Then suddenly, loud and clear, ringing impacts of metal on metal. Probably one of the Legionnaires using a sledge on the breech of the gun. Then a single shot, like a sharp question—*tack-o?*

Quick, yellowish flashes, loud explosions—hand grenades.

"Knock off the sight, take it away—" This was Murzon's voice. Aubert broke into a run. In the flashes, he could discern the men moving about the field-gun. Then there was a heavier explosion—they had blown up the mouth of the long barrel.

"All set, Lieutenant—"

"All right, get going—they'll be coming."

"France—Legion—F r a n c e—Legion!" Aubert shouted. It would not do to be shot or knifed by mistake by one of the raiding group. The Legionnaires were running back, for the trail on which they had come. Aubert intercepted the one in the lead. "Follow this chap—the one with the white armband."

That was Akli. Akli would get them away.

"Where's Lieutenant Murzon? Murzon?"

"Back there—in the pit—"

Aubert and Fritz rushed on. They crouched and leaped down five or six feet into a hole in the ground. The lieutenant's knee touched heavily on a bulky, yielding substance. There was a swishing of escaping air, but no moan. His groping hand came in horrible contact with flesh and beard.

"Who's that?"

"France—Legion—"

He could distinguish the outline of the mangled gun barrel, the curve of the wheels. And a struggling group nearby.

"Come on, Lieutenant—come on!"

"I'll stay here and hold them a while—"

"We can't leave you. You know that."

The Riffi were closing in. Probably those who had escaped from the pit when the Legionnaires raided it were bringing help. They were firing often at random. The missiles screamed about, sank into the dry earth of the pit. Murzon was determined to remain, three of his followers were urging him to run.

Aubert pushed through them, to reach his friend.

"Eh," a startled voice said, "that's Aubert—"

"Raoul, come away."

"You here? Can't get rid of you."

"We've got to get out—"

"I'm staying here—"

There was a scuffle, Murzon was pried loose from the wheel to which he had clung with one hand. He was hustled over the embankment, and started to run. He no longer protested. Perhaps his will to die had broken.

All around, knots of Riffi were searching for them. Hails were exchanged. Shots brought loud protestations and oaths. Aubert thought feverishly that scattering the Legionnaires into small groups had worked out for the best. The natives were looking for a compact file of men.

"This way—this way—"

"Menwhua?"

AUBERT called back an answer. But his dialect did not deceive the questioner. Shots thudded from a spot less than forty feet away. Fritz fired at the flashes, then they ran on again. They reached the sunken path, crashed through the low

brush fringing its rim. And for an instant their silhouettes must have shown against the lighter sky, for a startling outburst of gunfire followed them.

The lieutenant leaped, dragging Murzon after him. He picked himself up, astonished to find himself whole. He knew that Akli had run down the path toward the south. Fritz was helping the sub-lieutenant to his feet. "Hit?"

"No—it's too damn silly," Murzon said. "My knee again—that jump—" Murzon took a step, another. "It's not as bad this time. It hurts but I can hobble." Again he was holding on to Aubert's shoulder, and as he skipped along, he started to laugh, a hoarse, rueful laugh. "Can't seem to help it—anything I do is funny when I try to get dramatic. I wasn't created to play heroes."

Behind them and to the left, hundreds of men were moving in the night. On the right and ahead, only scattered voices could be heard. Akli stood in their path.

"We leave the trail here—I've got most of them lying low in the bushes. Come on—"

They followed him, and found the men huddled in a hollow of soil. Eight of them—six were missing, killed or wandering about on their own toward the lines.

"We stay here for an hour or two," Akli said. "They're already looking for us nearer the lines. When they quiet down more, we can make it. It will be dark for five hours yet."

They rested flat on the ground, tensing only when the shouts came near. No one was seriously hurt. And for a long while, nobody spoke, except a youthful German Legionnaire, he would chuckle happily and mutter, *"Cannon kaput, ja, cannon kaput."* He told the truth, the field-gun was done for. The Riffi had no arsenal in which the breech could be repaired, and the man who had set off the charge in the muzzle said it had done its work perfectly.

It was useless to consider that six men were missing—four more than the gun had killed in a month's activity. The objective, a lowering of the enemy's morale, was achieved. They had been deprived of their artillery!

"Come on," Akli urged at last.

The Riffi had gone back to their camps. They probably believed the Legion raiders already back in the French lines. Somebody had cut a stout stick for Murzon, who used it as a crutch. The rest had to wait for him, and he cursed himself as a burden.

"I feel as if I had been drunk," he told Aubert. "I'm sorry about that trick that I played on you. I went crazy, you know. I wonder why now. If they had left me up there at the gun pit, I could have gone through with it. But once you start escaping, your will melts. I'm a fool."

"Yes," Aubert agreed. "Nothing in it. Maryse used me to get you jealous, because you'll admit yourself, you weren't very attentive. She'll never admit it, of course. I bet you get a letter inside a fortnight, and that everything will be all right."

"You have reason to think that, Richard?"

"Yes, I have." This time he would get a letter off to the girl.

"Is that what she wrote you?"

"Not in those exact words. But I read between the lines." Aubert paused. "I'm not deceiving myself, Raoul. She'll come back to you."

"No wonder you wouldn't show me her letters. I'll never tell her you told me." Murzon grinned sheepishly. "We've known each other a long time—"

Murzon was swinging from the deepest despair to the wildest hope. Aubert started to think him a fool, then checked himself—Murzon believed what he wished to believe, what hurt him least at the moment. And a sane man should not presume to pass judgment on a man in love.

In the gray mist of approaching dawn, there sounded a shout. Then a gun was discharged. The raiders had to run for shelter, in a thicket. And for a moment,

as the Riffi formed a ring around them and crept nearer, they believed themselves lost. Their ammunition was limited to a few rounds per man, fatigue was beginning to assert itself.

"Cannon *kaput,*" the young Legionnaire shouted like a war slogan. "Cannon *kaput!*" The destruction of the gun had made a deep impression on him. He felt his life was paid for in advance.

But they were nearer the French lines than they had believed. Shortly after daybreak, two squadrons of Spahis crossed the stream, and charged their attackers. And when infantry battalions appeared in support, the Riffi refused a pitched battle and dispersed rapidly.

THREE of the six missing had reached safety ahead of them. Nothing was ever learned of the others. They had been butchered somewhere in the bushes, during their flight.

Murzon got a citation, of course, and promotion to full lieutenant. But again, Aubert was luckier; he received three lines more in the regimental decision, and his nomination to the rank of captain was confirmed. Perhaps it was normal that he should get the most credit, as he ranked his friend. Nevertheless, Jolibois and a few others nodded their heads wisely; Aubert had hogged the show again!

The Riff Campaign was all over for Murzon. He had caught one in the shoulder at the last minute as he was helped in, and his knee was giving him trouble. After a brief sojourn in the Military Hospital at Fez, he went on convalescence leave to France. Aubert received a few letters from him, cordial but tactful, informing him that all had been settled satisfactorily.

Then there was a long silence.

Months later, at the storming of the Jebel Kefkoun, the mail was distributed as the companies moved toward the front. Aubert opened a large envelope. It was an engraved announcement of the marriage, and a card of invitation. He decided that he could not very well use it, as the date was that of yesterday.

Following the attack, in the middle of the afternoon, he saw stretcher-bearers pass near with an officer. He stepped nearer, recognized Jolibois.

"Serious?" he asked.

"Back and thigh, I got a good helping," Jolibois replied. "Say, have you a cigarette? Mine were in my pants pocket and got soaked with blood. Thanks." He inhaled deeply, then let the smoke drift from his nostrils, through his pale lips. "Did you get an invitation from Murzon? You'd sooner be in his place than here, eh?" He started to chuckle, then he winced. "But even you can't win everything every time!"

Aubert grinned and reached for the wounded man's hand.

"I don't know why I'm sorry to see you banged up! Maybe it's because the battalion won't smell the same. Anyway, I'll miss you. Try to get back soon."

"I will. If only to find out whether it's from loss of blood that I'm beginning to like you. I'll say one thing—" and the mangled man on the stretcher nodded three times. "You never blinked. You can stand things!"

Aubert watched him being carried down the slope, smiled again and shrugged. He had risked his life twice for Murzon and was blamed for taking advantage of him! Now, he was given credit for bearing up under something that did not touch him—the marriage of Maryse. He felt only amusement, and no rancor; that was the way legends started in the Legion. From now on, whatever he did would be because of his broken heart!

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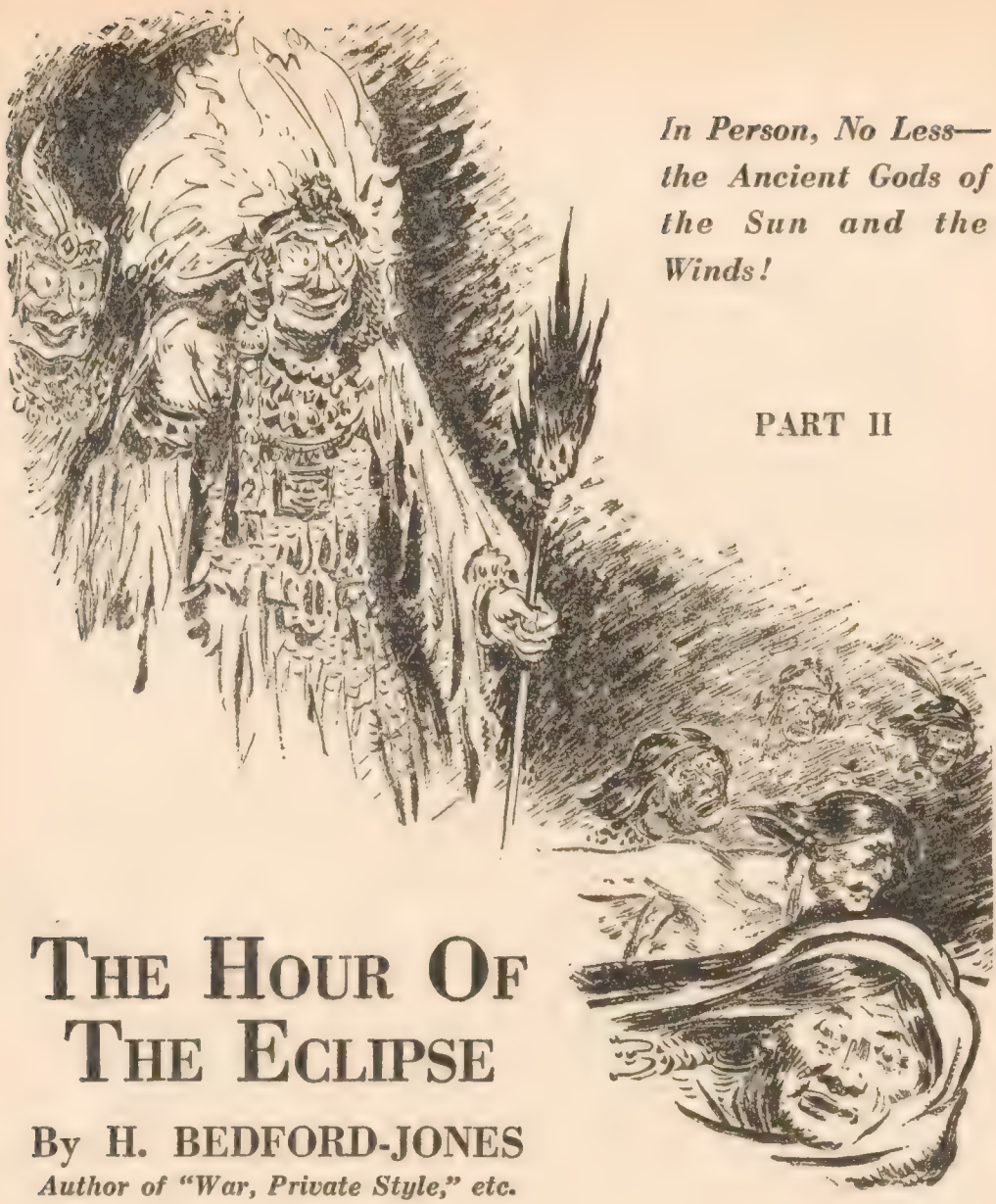


In Person, No Less—the Ancient Gods of the Sun and the Winds!

PART II

THE HOUR OF THE ECLIPSE

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "War, Private Style," etc.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE STORY AND WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

"I FIRST heard from Bill James after he had been dead two years." This startling statement opens this amazing B-J novel.

Bill James had been a test pilot who had disappeared among the Mexican mountains—north of the sun, south of the moon. Then a cryptic message reaches his fellow pilot, Fred Fredericks, and a strange expedition sets out to find if the message is real and Bill James still alive. In the party are Fred, Ernie—Bill James' enterprising and lovely sister—Ed Grimm, a strange and forceful adventurer, whose chief interest is in gold, and a Yaqui named Huacho who acts as guide.

They reach deadly country indicated in Bill James' message, ford the boiling stream which almost daunt them and man-

age to arrive at the hour of the eclipse which has been designated as the time they can penetrate the Indian defenses of the region.

Almost dead from heat and thirst, Fred finally encounters a "golden girl," an amazing young woman who speaks English and knows of "Beel James." Her they follow to an amazing settlement, where descendants of the ancient Aztecs intermarried with Spaniards still live in feudal state, their ruler being the golden girl, her greatest treasure the missing Bill James—who calls her Maggie, of all things.

They learn of dissension in this apparent Eden. Indians are covetous of the rich island where Maggie and her retainers live and plan revolt to seize the cellars full of ancient gold. The visiting party is attacked by these Indians and Fred fears that Grimm has been killed; indeed he is lamenting this fact when Grimm himself turns up, and wants to know what all the fuss is about.

VII

"I TAKE IT," said Grimm, quite ignoring our amazed questions and our incredulous delight, "that we're safe here. That is, from any attack by your servants.

"Why, yes," responded Bill James. "Now that they know you're friends—"

Grimm waved his hand and broke in. "All right. Go back and get me some clothes, the more fantastic the better! And some grub. I've had a good sleep, I've heard your talk, and what we need now is action, as Fred says. I swam all around your damned island last night, after shaking off your friends—well, move! Move!"

I leaped up. "Let me go. Stay here and get acquainted, Bill."

"Good idea." Bill James sank back. "Take anything in the house you fancy. My room's upstairs, on the left from the staircase. Get him one of these gowns."

"Gowns, hell!" spat out Grimm. "Get

me some clothes! Where's our boat?"

"Somewhere around in front." Bill James waved his hand vaguely. "I hadn't thought about it."

I departed, chuckling. There was some excuse for Ed Grimm to be in bad humor; a naked man is at a disadvantage. And I was astonished by my own delight to find him alive, until I analyzed it in my own mind; his sudden appearance was shocking, stimulating, vigorous.

For I could see now the terrible change in Bill James. He had been through some bad experiences; these two years had altered him sadly. It was not like him to sit still and hear that his sister was grabbed by a gang of Indians—in the old days, he would simply have exploded in six directions. Now he left the action to Maggie.

Excuse? Oh, plenty of excuse, and I had been the first to tone him down; just the same, there it was. With Grimm around, I could see where he and I would spark to some purpose, but Bill James had changed and there was no use denying it.

As I came into the patio, enclosed on three sides by the house, I could smell cooking and was glad of it, but I met no one. My soreness and stiffness had loosened up by this time, and I headed on into the building. Passing through a corridor and a wide doorway, I came to a sudden halt.

Here was a glorious big room, as big as a hall. Redskin finery? Not a bit of it. Not a hint anywhere. Here was the Sanchez family and nothing else, except a majestic Aztec presence.

In this moment, I knew instantly why Peyotl wanted to grab this place, and why Maggie could not leave it. There was beauty and glory all around; the cellars might be full of gold, but here in this room was both gold and loveliness, and more besides. More than just Sanchez alone. One could feel the barbaric touch of dead imperial hands.

The walls were bare stone, white and brown; they were carved and tinted in Aztec style, to form a gorgeous symphony of form and color that fairly hit one in the face. Here and there were bits of Spanish armor and old weapons. What little furniture appeared was low and massive, of heavy carved wood. But there were other things. Masks, for example; huge and wonderful masks of turquoise mosaic, with nodding plumes. Upon two wooden lay figures hung the most amazing garments I had ever seen; masks, feather-work robes, and gold armlets and necklaces by the dozen.

Everywhere in the room was gold, set into the walls, hanging loose, standing around in the form of vases and worked objects of all sorts. Solid panels in the wall were overlaid with gold. Gold, turquoise, and the so-called jade of Mexico were on all sides. It was easy to see that the first comers here had been artists, and glorious artists.

From a window, I looked forth upon the terrace and water-stairs, where we had come ashore before daybreak. The deserted air of the house was explained. Along the stairs were crowded men and women, talking excitedly, staring into the shimmering vapor that surrounded the islet. Maggie had shoved a few men into one of the dugout boats and gone, impulsively, swiftly, and these others were waiting.

I looked around; a heap of objects caught my eye, and I jumped at it. Clothes, packs, everything that had been in our boat, carefully piled together. Here was my pistol, and I seized it joyfully, also my clothes, belt, extra clips. In a flash, I shed my cotton robe and got into my pants, and then saw another pistol—that belonging to Grimm. It had doubtless been retrieved from the water where he had gone down.

An idea came to me, and I did not wait to balance cause and effect. Spreading out my white robe on the floor, I stripped the two largest of the lay figures—masks, feather garments, huge sandals, weapons. One had a long club-like stick set with

jagged bits of obsidian, the other a copper sword three feet long and sharp as a razor. Rolling everything up in the robe, I shouldered it and cleared out on the jump.

THE package weighed plenty. What with the moist heat and the exertion, I was gasping when I staggered along the path to the open space and fountain. Bill James sat there talking with Grimm, who had covered his chief nakedness with a wildcat skin from one of the seats. They stared at me, Grimm with intent eagerness, Bill with a bewildered look in his eyes.

"Bill! Go get us some grub, and do it as fast as you can hobble!" I broke out. "Bring it here yourself; we'll wait. Talk later, blast it all! Hurry! Leave us those cigarettes."

He obeyed, with a helpless gesture. I lit a cigarette as he went limping away, and met the coppery eyes of Ed Grimm. The look held a wolfish approval.

"When you really wake up, Fred, you look as though you were going places," he said, taking a fresh cigarette. "What's wrong with your friend Bill James?"

"So you noticed it too, did you? Bill's changed. Not the same; lost his fire. Now, look at this stuff." I opened out the cotton robe, at one side, so it could be shoved under the bushes in a hurry, and showed the costumes and masks. "We can't depend on Bill for anything. I'm afraid we can depend on Maggie to gum up whatever game we start, but here's our chance to give her the slip. The minute she gets back, I'll be watching for the news, and will bring it here in a hurry. There are boats on the ramp, and paddles. Here are costumes that'll knock the eye out of those redskins in town. If you're game to take the chance, we'll go it blind."

Grimm solemnly reached out, gripped my hand, and pumped it.

"Fred, the sky's the limit!" he rasped. "Got my gun, huh? Swell work. I get the idea; you're damned right we'll chance it! I'm not going back on Huacho for a minute."

"Same here. If Ernie's in a jam, it's all the more reason. Did you hear what Bill said about those shore Indians?"

He nodded. "What's more, I've been getting the lay of the land from him—their town, temple and so forth. All I want to know now, is where they've got Huacho."

"We'll learn that when Maggie shows up. First, get some grub and be stoked for business. I'm empty as hell. Then go to work."

"You and me, buddy, are of one mind," said he. "But I don't like Bill's attitude of mental languor, lassitude, helplessness. He hasn't any pep. Looks as though you had shot some into him, though; here he comes."

He was on the way, with his arms full and his stick forgotten, limping along rapidly. When he got to us, and saw the stuff spread out, his eyes widened.

"My lord, you guys are nuts!" he exploded. "Those are the most sacred things in the whole place—robes of the ancient priests, used in the old rituals. They haven't been touched for generations."

"Swell! That's what I figured, more or less," I said, and fell on the big bowl of stew. "Pitch in, Ed! I'll get a load of this, then hop back and keep an eye on the landing. Bill, you'd better come along, and be ready to hold up Maggie with your silver tongue while we get moving. If she hasn't got Ernie and Huacho with her when she comes, we're off."

In the light of future events, I am compelled to admit that what gave us inspiration and courage was probably the sunlit mist closing in the islet. If we had been awake to the harsh and very stern realities of the whole situation and place, I strongly doubt whether we would have been so ready to plunge headlong, even with the thought of Huacho and Ernie in redskin hands. I did feel with Grimm, however, that we were not going to see Huacho tor-

tured or killed, and do nothing about it; even aside from the question of Ernie James.

We quite ignored the dismayed though feeble protests of Bill James. He saw what fools we were, but we did not. I gobbled the food rapidly, and Grimm asked more questions about the town and temple and so forth.

Then Bill took a notion that he should go with us, and said as much.

"Nothing doing," I told him. "Your place is here, to look after Maggie and keep a safe place of retreat for us. Look here, have those Indians in the town got firearms?"

"A few of 'em," said Bill. "Probably the three leaders have guns, but they realized very early the folly of arming the rank and file at the expense of their own supremacy. I don't imagine there are more than a dozen or two rifles or old muskets in the whole country."

Grimm and I exchanged a look. Those rifles were the ones kept at the shelf, in the mouth of the hot creek—and they had gone into the water last night. Which made us feel a bit more cheerful. On the other hand, Maggie's outfit had no guns either. It was hard to imagine that Bill had been here for two years and had taken no steps to arm these men; this was typical of his lassitude, his lack of initiative.

The priests of the moon-temple, according to Bill, were straddling the fence in the local row, but rather inclined to Moctzin's party of what might be termed intellectuals, for lack of a better name.

Hunger satisfied, and well satisfied, I applied myself to an *olla* which Bill had brought—a pottery jar filled with some kind of native drink, mildly stimulating and delicious. A cigarette, a light, and I was off.

"Better come along, Bill," I called back. "Grimm's all right, and I'll need you when Maggie shows up, to tell me what's happened. I figure on pulling out before she knows it."

Recovering his stick, Bill James came hobbling after me.

"But what'll I tell her?" he demanded. "How'll I explain that you're gone?"

I halted, and gave him one look. "Bill, you're the worst henpecked man, with less to show for it, than any I ever heard of. For gosh sake, why don't you buck up? Give Maggie the spanking she needs and assert yourself."

"You don't know Maggie," he rejoined. "She's capable of anything."

"So were you, once," I shot back, and went on. That shot got under his hide, too; I could hear him growling profane language as he followed.

"You're a grateful cuss, after the trouble I took to shave you and tie up your feet," he grumbled, when we were in the gorgeous big room and going to a front window. There was no glass in any of the windows; they were crossed by copper bars, set in the thick stone wall. "I'd like to know what you mean to do, anyhow."

"Get Ernie and Huacho, and figure on clearing out, quick," I said. Then, reaching the window, I stiffened. "Hey! Look here!"

The men and women on the wide stairs were chattering excitedly. The vague outline of a boat was taking shape. Bill uttered a sharp word as he recognized the four in it.

"Maggie and three of her men! Hello—for the love of Mike!"

HIS voice was startled. A second craft appeared, with only two paddlers; at sight of it a tense silence struck the gathered watchers. Maggie spoke out with quiet, reassuring words, and Bill caught my arm.

"In the stern—see? That's Peyotl himself. She says he's here for a confab, as a friend. And what's that in his craft?"

Peyotl was a powerful, broad-faced Indian; he and his paddler were both dark. Between them, prostrate in their dugout, was a figure. As the boat came to the

stairs, Maggie gave quick orders, and two of her men lifted the figure out. It was Ernie, unconscious but seemingly unharmed. A groan escaped Bill James at sight of her.

"Ernie!" He caught his breath. "It is, it is!"

"Of course it is. Check it!" I broke in. "Listen!"

They were all talking at once, that glorious golden girl, Peyotl, the natives, in a voluble and excited flurry of words. This Peyotl, once his stolid Indian mien became animated, was an impressive brute, with a wide gash of a mouth and glittering, powerful eyes. Instead of the usual cotton robe or bare pelt, he was clad in some sort of army uniform, probably Mexican, and had a pistol belted at his hip.

"Well, spill it!" I demanded impatiently, and jiggled Bill's arm. "What's the gab all about? Tell me, tell me!"

He wiped sweat from his face, and complied.

"She's not hurt, just fainted; Ernie, I mean. Maggie has ransomed her with a promise to talk terms with Peyotl and Carnero; that's why Peyotl's here. Seems that Ernie was wearing a gold ornament, Maggie's badge of rank. I don't savvy it."

I did, but there was no time to explain. The bangle dropped by the golden girl, which I had passed on to Ernie, of course; evidently this, and her bronze-gold hair, had saved her life.

"They've got Huacho and refuse to give him up," went on Bill, staring widely. "Peyotl is saying that he killed some of their men. Maggie is urging him to stop the torture until they've talked; Peyotl won't do it. Huacho's being tortured now, in the market-place outside town. Won't be killed till night comes, but he's a goner. They're bringing Ernie into the house—"

"Look after her, then," I said, turning. "So long."

I made tracks and lost no time doing it, forgetful of my sore and aching feet. Ernie safe and well! This uplifted me on exultant wings. No matter what her drawbacks might be, Maggie had done a swell job so far.

The sight of Peyotl gave instant comprehension of the man. An intelligent brute, cruel and lustful, determined to grab everything his betters owned; and he would do it, unless a bullet stopped him. Plain to see what bitter, relentless conflict would result between such a man and the slim, proudly impetuous Maggie! In such cases, however, it's the brute who usually wins.

I came hurrying into the open space by the fountain, to find Ed Grimm nearly dressed in his new outfit.

"Do we go or not?" he barked at me.

"Yep. Ernie's here, but they're torturing Huacho now."

"Where? Temple?"

"No. In the market-place."

"Climb into your rig, all except the mask. Can't dress in that cranky boat."

While I put on the costume over my trousers, I made report. Grimm was in a blaze. He knew exactly where to go, for he had been highly practical in getting information from Bill James. What to do when we got there, would depend on circumstances.

"Keep that big sword handy," said he. "We'll need it to cut Huacho free. Leave me the initiative; height will count for a lot. Also, I know a bit of Indian lingo and signs, which they'll be sure to understand. Suit you?"

"You're the doctor," I rejoined. "We both have the same objective here."

"Then get a move on. This mist is going to do the trick for us—conceals, exaggerates, renders mysterious. Wouldn't dare chance it otherwise."

He was half grunting, half talking, as he got one of the dugouts into the water, down the inclined ramp, and put in paddles. The two masks, huge gaudy affairs with thongs to go around the head, followed. Grimm got in. With a last hitch to my costume, I took my place and we shoved out. Grimm, in the stern, directed our course around the back of the islet and next moment everything was shut out by the shimmering, steaming vapor.

"Only thing I saved last night, when I got rid of my clothes, was the pocket compass," he said, grinning. "I was panicky, and a man does fool things at such times. Now's when we need it, however."

"Sure you know where you're going when you get there?" I demanded.

"You bet. Market-place is between the town and the water. Moon temple is to the right. Can't miss it. I've got the compass bearings of the town, and anyway it's close. Say, do you know that you've hit on a damned ingenious notion?"

"That's the best thing I do, Ed. Just what strikes you as ingenious?"

"These costumes. Remember, the eclipse was only last night—seems a year away to me! The Indians will all be jittery. When we show up, they'll connect us with the eclipse, sure as you're born!"

"Hope so," I rejoined, rather fervently.

And so I did, too, for it was just beginning to dawn upon me that we were doing a fool thing.

VIII

IT WAS the voices that guided us, at the end. Sharp yelping voices of savagery and ferocity, the wailing chants of squaws in mourning. Huacho had killed several men before they threw a fishnet over him and so captured him, as we later discovered.

The shelving beach was empty, except for boats drawn up. Every available person was taking part in the festivities dead ahead, and we had leisure to arrange our masks, sandals and robes, and to thank heaven for the misty vapor, in the sobering light of what we found ourselves up against.

Some hundreds of yards away, nearly hidden by the shining fog, was the town, rising in terraces something like a Hopi village. To our right bulked a tremendous structure. This temple was an Aztec *teocalli* or pyramid, copied from the earlier Mayan temples. Instead of stairs winding around it, however, the summit was gained by a straight and rather steep ramp. This came down into the market-place, well away from the pyramid itself, and ended ten feet above ground in a huge circular staircase of stone. Under the jutting ramp and the pyramid were the temple and the priests' quarters.

At the time, we paid scant attention to all this. Our objective was off to the left, on the bare stretch of ground used for a meeting place on market days. Here were Indians massed in groups, hundreds of them, men and women, with weapons of all kinds in evidence. They were thronged about something we could not see, and their voices rose on the air like the snarling of wild beasts. Most of the men were stripped, the women wore white robes. On the near end of the ramp, at the top of the circular stairs, was a group in white, apparently priests from the temple, also watching.

"Ready? Let's go," muttered Ed Grimm. "We'll try absolute silence first."

He stepped out. Our sandals were high, ungainly affairs like gaily decorated moccasins on wooden frames. The masks, to which the feathered topknots were fastened, further increased our height; and Grimm, to begin with, was a bit of a giant. When I caught sight of him, even I was impressed and awed. The vapor, which softened all details a yard away, made his

figure appear enormous and superhuman. Added to this was the fantasy of the costumes and weapons and gold ornaments, and the horribly grinning masks of turquoise mosaic with huge shell eyes, whose pierced eyeballs gave us free vision.

I kept at his elbow as Grimm stalked straight at the mass of Indians, the long stick or club with its jagged obsidian fangs swinging in his hand. Not until we were close up did anyone notice us. Then the jingle of the gold ornaments drew the attention of a squaw. She turned, took one look, and let out a screech like a steam-whistle. A scowling buck looked around and came to his feet; his face went absolutely black with terror, then he revved up his engine and just went away from there in a blind, mad burst of fright through the whole crowd. After that, the general attention was all ours.

Panic was no name for it. Those brown devils melted away on all sides. Some flung themselves on their faces; women screamed and pelted off, the men drew back into huddled bunches, eyes rolling in their dark visages. Evidently they knew what our appearance indicated, for the scattered voices combined into rolling cries, repeating the same words over and over, probably the names of the gods we represented.

Without uttering a sound, we kept straight on, stalking steadily along. And by this time we could see our objective.

Marking the center of the place was a big stone cross—not the Christian symbol, but the Aztec cross of the winds. To this was fastened the figure of Huacho, arms outspread and bound with leather thongs, the rest of his body free. The group of redskins who had been tormenting him had drawn away at sight of our advance, and we gained a clear view of the frightful picture he presented. Only at close approach did I see that the blood dripping from him was not entirely his own.

From a bullock, slaughtered at one side, strips of rawhide had been cut. These had been closely wrapped about his forehead, throat, waist and limbs. The rawhide, shrinking and constricting into bands of iron as it dried, formed a remorseless torture. Since there was no blazing sun to effect this, the process had been quickened by holding firebrands close, heating rawhide and flesh alike. This had been going on for some time, and by night the torture would have become incredible.

UNHURRIED, we strode toward him; silence had fallen, tense silence of suspense, as the crowds awaited our purpose. Huacho, gasping for air, rolled his eyes at us. He was unyielding in his torment, uttering no sound of pain, but I could hear his breath whistling terribly. A spasm of fear shot into his convlused features; he thought, of course, were we priests or gods or devils come to heighten his torture.

Grimm came to a halt in front of him and breathed a low word for me alone.

"Cut him loose."

Huacho caught the sound. His teeth flashed in a horrible mirthless grin of comprehension. I stepped up to him, and quickly put the edge of the long copper sword to the hide thongs that held his wrists. It sheared through them, and his arms dropped.

"Come on," grunted Grimm, under his breath. "Lead, Fred."

I turned and stepped out. And then, as Huacho hobbled after me, hell broke loose.

The Indians realized that, whatever we were, we had come to take the Yaqui. On all sides arose a furious storm of yells. The bulk of the crowd was to our left as we turned for the beach, grouped between us and the town; and now this mass of Indians began a forward surge that meant business.

It was no time for pistols. We were depending heavily on superstition, and gods just don't carry guns. Grimm did the one thing possible, and it was something no one else could have done.

He faced toward the surging throng.

The leader was a big brawny Indian who flourished a spear heavily adorned with gold, looking more like a badge of office than a weapon. With him was a priest, to judge from the white robe and the gold ornaments. These two plunged straight at Grimm, who stood silent and motionless. They yapped furiously at him, while their followers hung back to see what happened. Then they began striking at him.

Grimm gave them no warning whatever. He did not move. Only his arm moved; swiftly, from a dead rest, all that tremendous muscular strength of his flowing out. The long stick with its jagged obsidian points struck the Indian. It tore his face; he fell screaming and writhing. The priest uttered one yell and turned as though to leap away, but the stick seemed to move on in the same blow—a backhand swing, up and out. Struck across the back of the skull, the priest went down and lay still; he was brained. That was a cruel and fearful weapon in the right hands.

Then Grimm just stood motionless again, silent, a deadly immobile force. And this awed those brown devils more than anything else. It was inhuman. This hideous grinning mask facing them with no fear or other emotion, tinged with mystery and supernatural power—it was just too much for them. A curl of vapor swirled around Grimm's figure and increased its height as though he were lifting toward the sky. The brown ranks ebbed back. With cries of terror, more of the Indians flung forward on their faces, prostrate.

Grimm turned, after a moment, and stalked in our wake, unhurried, majestic. This time, there was no interference.

HUACHO had his wits about him. Tortured as he was, too proud to try and rid himself of those shrunken rawhide bands in the sight of his tormentors, he was alert. I caught a low word from him as he followed me.

"Toward the temple. Confuse them."

So I kept going toward the end of the ramp and the circular stairs there, getting his idea and approving it. If we had headed straight for the boats and shore, the crowd would have guessed our object and might or might not have let us go. As it was, they now thought we were taking Huacho to the temple, and hung on indecision.

We came close to those stairs. Looking up, through the mask, I saw that the group of priests there had sunk on their faces. One man alone stood upright. He was not a priest but an Indian, naked to the waist, arms folded, eyes upon us. A striking figure because out of symmetry, his shoulders very wide, his head very large, his body small. And upon his brown face was a wide grin. He even moved one hand as though in signal to us, startling me, yet I had never seen him before.

A grunt from Huacho. At the foot of the circular stairs, I turned and headed for the boats. Grimm caught up; with Huacho between us, we approached the shore. A few voices rose from the crowd. The women started their wailing chant again.

"Take our own boat, Fred," said Grimm. "Otherwise, they'd know where we came from and figure things out. Boats all look alike to us, not to them. And move fast, damn it! One of 'em got me."

I did not comprehend what he meant, but his voice was urgent. There was our dugout, and Huacho tumbled in as I shoved it out—tumbled in, and with a low groan began to tear frantically at the coils of rawhide about his forehead and throat. I held the boat, and Ed Grimm got into the bow. He shoved something into my hand. It was the little compass.

"Fast!" he said in a choked voice. "Southwest by a point south—hurry it!"

Then, as he put up his feet, I saw the blood dribbling over his decorated moccasins.

I shoved out and hopped in, went sprawling, seized a paddle and got up again. From behind us came a voice, shout-

ing something; then the deep *"spang-g!"* of a rifle. The bullet went close. I drove in the paddle and the mist curled around us. Another shot, a second bullet that chipped the wood of the gunnel beside me. I changed course, and the mist swallowed us up, but still another shot sounded. No bullet—we were out of sight in the mist.

As we learned afterward, this rifleman was Carnero, who had no fear of gods or devils.

"That blasted priest!" Grimm spoke with a gasp. He was doubled over. "Got his knife into me. I'm holding the cut. Get to the island, Fred! Can't look after it in this craft. How goes it, Huacho?"

Throat free at least, Huacho was dipping up water to his mouth. He grunted, and fell to work at the rawhide constricting his waist; between burns and bruises, it must have been a ghastly job. I paddled like hell, watching the compass.

"Thanks, friends," said Huacho suddenly, in Spanish. His waist was free; untold relief was in his voice. "Thanks."

"Don't mention it," said Grimm. "Grab a paddle, if you can use it. This is bad. Had to do for that priest—he knew his knife had reached me. He knew I was no god!"

"You sure did for him," I said. We forged on through the mist, apparently not pursued.

"Steady!" Grimm lifted his head. Huacho was working with a paddle, now, and we were surging along fast. "I see something. Hit the same place we started from, Fred. Don't want that Peyotl chap to see us—looks like something ahead."

SOMETHING vaguely white, mottled—ah! The island. Grimm directed us, and we skirted it. Luckily we had missed the front approach. I knew where we were now. Passing the low dwellings at the rear, we came up to the same ramp from which we had departed.

"And a damned good job," said Grimm, as the prow scraped. The shore, the fountain and clearing, were deserted. Even the cotton robe I had left here was untouched.

Now I had my hands full. Getting rid of the gorgeous costumes, I found that not only first aid but surgery was needed, and nothing to do it with. Grimm had a frightful gash on the inside of the thigh, and Huacho, aside from burns and contusions, had a couple of spear wounds that would have killed an ordinary man and needed sutures at once. I could handle the stitches, having an aptitude for surgery, but lacked essentials.

"If our stuff is all at the house, Fred," spoke up Grimm, "there's an emergency kit in my roll, with needles and gut."

"Swell!" I exclaimed, in relief. "You two stretch out and keep quiet. No use trying to hide. I'll be back in no time."

The afternoon was about half gone. The air was still full of the misty vapor.

I went to the house, and in the patio came slap on the family. Bill James was there, staring at me with comical amazement; Maggie was there, and Peyotl was there, apparently all engaged in a hot session. Peyotl was darkly flushed and ugly of eye, Maggie was cool and lovely, and greeted me with a radiant smile.

"Where have you been?" she said in clipped, strongly accented English.

"Seeking for shells by the seashore," I said. "How's Ernie?"

"Asleep," chipped in Bill James. He introduced me to Peyotl, who did not offer to shake hands but stared hard at me. I turned to the house, and gave Bill a wink. He came along after me.

Our stuff was still piled in the big room. I got the first-aid kit from Grimm's roll, and then Bill jumped me to know what had happened.

"We've got Huacho, and some assorted injuries," I said. "Grimm and Huacho are both due for hospital. Where can you put 'em?"

"Loads of room," said Bill. "Have any trouble?"

"No, just a picnic," I retorted. "No time to talk. Is Peyotl staying long?"

"Not if I know it," Bill snapped. "As soon as he clears out, I'll fetch Maggie."

"Bring the ambulance squad as well," I said, and went on back. In the patio, the golden girl wanted me to join the discussion, but I begged off and kept going.

That job of surgery was a pretty ticklish business. Huacho had one stab so close to the heart that I could almost see it beating. My chief worry was lest Grimm's wound had struck an artery, but here luck was with us. Neither one of them let out a sound as I stitched, and Ed Grimm laughed harshly when I said a week or so would see them fit again.

"You don't know what climate and hard living will do, my worthy Fred," said he. "You'll see Huacho up and about tomorrow, maybe me as well. What worries him just now is that his throwing-hatchet and his pet knife are gone. By the way, I suppose you didn't observe a queerly constructed gent over at town, standing at the edge of the ramp from the temple?"

"Yes," I said. "And he was grinning at us, for some reason. Why?"

"Huacho says he's the fellow Moctzin that Bill James told us about. How's Ernie?"

"Asleep. She's all right. Well, here comes our hostess, so look pleasant."

BILL JAMES, in a flutter of excitement, was coming with Maggie, and I gathered that Peyotl had departed, somewhat disconcerted by revelation of my presence on the island.

Beyond one slight gasp, that golden girl never turned a hair at sight of Grimm and Huacho. They were the ones who showed astonishment, as well they might. She was a lovely and radiant thing, with never a hint of the savage about her. She wore an embroidered robe of emerald green, belted at the waist; her exquisite profile and golden skin might have combined Park Avenue and Palm Beach; her hair was arranged in an up-do as fresh as Hollywood, and her only ornament was an armband of chiseled and intricately worked gold. She was a figure of self-possessed pride, assurance, regal dignity, combined with a girlish appeal that went straight to the heart.

"No, no!" As Grimm moved to rise, she was at his side instantly, leaning over and pressing him back, seizing his hand, laughing a little. "Friends. Be quiet."

Huacho could not take his eyes off her. Bill James broke out with questions; but she, catching sight of the feathered robes and costumes, must have understood instantly what had happened. She scarcely listened as I sketched the adventure.

A dozen of her servants came along. She turned to them with swift directions; they gawked at us in wondering amazement and went obediently to work. Huacho began a huffy protest when they wanted to lift him, but at a word from Maggie he relaxed instantly. She seemed to exert a hypnotic charm over him. Grimm waved his hand to me, and flung me a word as he was carried toward the house, a cotton robe flung over his long naked shape.

"I've got it, Fred! I've got the answer! Tell you all about it when I see you."

I disregarded him, little dreaming what was astir in that callous and cruelly efficient brain of his. The robes and costumes were reverently gathered up by two of the servants. As Maggie directed them, Bill James turned to me with a critical survey.

"Fritz, you look like hell!" he said. "Come on, take a dip in the lake, then we'll join Maggie in the patio and go into matters. Never mind modesty; it ain't known around here, feller!"

My bandaged feet were in rags, and so was I; the reaction, after all the excitement, had hit me and left me at pretty low ebb. Seeing Maggie on her way to the house, I joined Bill on the ramp, kicked off my pants, and we took to the water. After that steamy, sweating air, it was blessed relief.

A few minutes served to show me, however, how enormously my strength was depleted. I crawled out. We donned cotton robes, which were about as much as could be comfortably worn, and took our way to the patio. There Maggie joined us, with word that the two patients were stowed in a room adjoining that of Ernie, and we settled down over fruits and a cold drink to discuss ourselves and the situation.

THAT girl was a wonder; she could unload her dignity as well as anybody, and had a bright, vivid personality with no pretense, evasion or pose. She was, however, a bit restrained, as though coolly suspicious of us. She had an excellent command of English with a pronounced accent and a queer way of leaving out words; to reproduce her actual speech would be impossible. When my story was given in detail, her eyes blazed excitedly.

"Well done, well done!" she broke out. "The man with the gold-trimmed spear whom Grimm struck first—that was Peyotl's lieutenant; the priest was his brother. Both are leaders of the extreme faction. Carnero was the man who shot at you. He's one of the few who have rifles. He would guess you were not gods; so would Peyotl. No one else. All would be sure that you were the ancient gods of the sun and the winds, in person!"

"My gosh, I'd like to have been there!" said Bill, a spark in his blue eyes. "Peyotl will have hard work persuading 'em this wasn't a superhuman visitation. Boy, you sure convinced them."

"Not all," I said in recollection. "That fellow Moctzin was wise to something."

Maggie frowned. "Moctzin? He's not an open enemy—yet. We're not sure just where he stands or what he wants. But Peyotl! Ah, that brute, that animal!"

Her eyes flashed, anger lit up her face like a bolt of lightning. Bill James lit a cigarette and nodded.

"We had a pretty hot go of it here," he observed. "Peyotl was set for the payoff. He aimed to bring his warriors over here today, smash us, then turn on Moctzin, who has fewer men but holds the strong position of the temple pyramid. The priests are with Moctzin, and Peyotl hesitates to burn his fingers. The arrival of Huacho and Ernie, showing that strangers are actually here, moved him to strike quickly. He said flatly he means to kill off everyone here, take Maggie for himself, and become the lord of the land."

"Then, if he's ready for action, why would he want to discuss terms?"

"The eclipse got him jittery; after all, he's an Indian. He thought we'd fall for his lies. He offered me gold and a free passage home, to get me out of the way; offered Maggie all sorts of things—tried to trick us into believing him. He'd keep no promises, later."

"Did you pretend to believe him and get time to think?"

"We did not," snapped Bill. "Maggie's no diplomat; he got her riled. The talk closed on threats. Luckily, when he goes back and finds what happened ashore, he'll be stymied for a bit; you must have given those Injuns a tremendous scare. Peyotl was downright sore when he left, and he didn't mince his words, either. I get rolled in rawhide and left in the sun to dry. Maggie becomes his squaw; Ernie goes to Carnero. The rest of our crowd here just get wiped out; they're almost pure Aztec, and the brown devils hate 'em like poison."

I GAVE him a curious glance. Two years ago, Bill James would have taken Peyotl apart for daring such words. Now he had done nothing. In Maggie's presence he seemed paralyzed.

"Can't your men fight?" I asked, turning to her. She eyed me rather critically and quite ignored the question as though it were too silly to require a reply.

"Your friend Grimm worse than Yaqui," she said, a spark smoldering in her eyes. "Yaqui a great caballero. Grimm hates you."

I laughed. "Don't be absurd, golden girl. Hates me? Not a bit of it."

"Wait and see when Ernie wakes up," said she. With a gesture of finality, she closed the subject. "You want to take Beel back home?"

"Sure," I replied. "And you too. If Bill wasn't in love with you, I'd grab you off myself."

"Oh! You have two wives?" said she. Bill broke out laughing, for she was serious, and I grinned. She got to her feet. "Here I am Chief," she said. "Back home with you, I am slave. You leave Beel here or I kill you."

She turned her back and strode away.

"Something," I observed, "gives me the suspicion that Maggie doesn't like me, Bill!"

He shrugged. "You see how it is. I told her about you and Ernie; she says you should have stayed home and left me alone. See here, don't you want to come to your room? I've had all your things taken there. If you'd like a nap before dinner—what do you say?"

"I'd love it. And I'll take a look at the hospital, too. But see here!" I added sharply. "You say you told Maggie about me and Ernie? What did you tell her?"

"Don't be a blasted fool," he said, and rose. "Why, two years ago I knew you were in love, you idiot! Come along."

He took me upstairs, to a room whose stone walls were covered with sculptures. A sleeping mat and soft rugs were on the floor, with our blanket rolls in one corner. He got me moccasins, a fresh robe, a packet of Mexican cigarettes, and we went to see the two hospital cases, in a room close by. There Bill left me.

Huacho was asleep. Ed Grimm was not, and beckoned me. I gave him a cigarette, and sat down beside him.

"I told you I had the answer," he said softly.

"To what?"

"A lot of things, Fred. The apathy, for example, that seems to grip Bill James. He's in love with a goddess—for Maggie is just about that. Her mere presence stifles his initiative, inspires him with inferiority feelings; she leaves him no chance to act, since she does everything. Consequently, he has become irresolute. She's probably been so emphatic on the subject of never going away from here, with him or without, that he's become afraid to act. Afraid of losing her."

"There's more to it than that," I said gloomily. His analysis struck me with its force, and I told him what Maggie had said about being a ruler here, a slave elsewhere.

"Sure; that's just it. And there's more, as you say. Also, Fred, there's a remedy."

"What?" I demanded sarcastically. "Ipecac?"

"No. Let Maggie lose her grand place here, get flogged, dishonored, broke—then, by God, you'd see Bill James flame out, a different man! What's more, she'd be the better for it. I had a few words with her when they put us here, and I understand her."

"Maybe she understands you, too, better than you think," I said, and left the room. In this mood, he angered me, he reacted to my anger, we were like two dogs with hackles up and growls a-throat.

I went to my room, stretched out on the pallet, and was asleep before I knew it.

When I woke, night had come. Someone was beside me, rousing me with determination. When I sat up, a lamp was lighted, nearby on the floor; and Ernie was

laughing and crying at once, as I held her against me.

"Oh, Fritz, Fritz!" she murmured happily. "When we lost you, last night, the world just went to pieces! And I can't believe it's all so beautifully patched up again, and we're here in fairyland!"

"Well, the name may be wrong, but the idea's right," said I, "and maybe I can convince you it's all real!"

I convinced her; and we went down to dinner together, not giving a damn for anyone.

IX

BLESSED repose; sleep, and plenty of it!

Noon of the next day saw me up and around, in a delicious laziness. Ernie and Bill were foregathering with Maggie. Huacho was so stiff with his burns and hurts that he could not move, but two of the servants were rubbing him with some native ointment, which they claimed would put him on his feet in a day or so. Grimm was up, true to his prediction, but keeping mighty quiet. The misty vapor was thinning out so that we could get vague glimpses of the mainland, and Bill said it would be gone by next morning.

We were, superficially, a happy little house-party with nothing on our minds. In cold reality, we were going through a new realignment, thanks largely to Maggie. To all of us, except Huacho, she was suspicious and even hostile, for Huacho was the only one who had not come in search of Bill James, and cared not a snap whether Bill went back to civilization or stayed here. We had not come to help her, and she knew it. She even showed herself miffed with Bill, and I gathered they had been having a row.

Indeed, I felt acutely sorry for this golden girl. She was well aware that we had no notion of getting behind her and fighting. We wanted to get away from here and take Bill with us—and her too, of course. But this only made her furious. She meant to fight for her rights to the last gasp, and she looked upon Bill as one of her rights. So, in this sense, she could only regard us as enemies; yet we were Bill's friends, and she was far too wise to antagonize Bill and make him choose between us and her. She had to make us welcome and pretend a friendliness she did not feel, and she was not good at pretending.

With all this, she was torn by fear—fear of those brown devils ashore, fear of losing Bill, fear of making a false step. She must have been in veritable agonies of fear, the kind of fear that only the bravest and noblest of persons can experience, a realization of helplessness before the onslaughts of destiny. She stood alone, and it was a tough world.

But Huacho, from the first moment, actually worshipped her, and he was a man she could understand fully. They got on.

Poor Bill was torn between two fires, and bewildered. Ernie, as we sat there in the early afternoon, apparently perceived none of the undercurrents. She admired Maggie and made the fact evident. I thought she even missed the change in her brother. At all events, she presently plunged straight into a discussion of when we could leave and how. I tried to stave off the subject, but Grimm caught it back and brutally began to dissect it, insisting that we reach some decision at once. Huacho was not with us, but Huacho would do what Grimm said. I think Grimm was motivated by a malicious desire to torment Maggie.

"We'd better reach some conclusion as quickly as possible," he said. "Bill, you've no horses here?"

"None," said Bill, looking worried.

"Horses are out, then. It has occurred to me that going afoot would be quite feasible if horses and water were sent out from San Tomas to meet us. These Indians here go to San Tomas without trouble; we can do it if they can. Send

one person, say Huacho, on ahead to make arrangements, and our difficulties would be solved."

"Huacho won't be in shape to do that for quite a while," I cut in drily. "None of us will be. I'd suggest that we let our discussion wait for ten days or so. By that time, we'll know whether Bill is going with us."

"Of course I am!" said Bill James with a hot outburst. "So's Maggie, whether she admits it or not. But hell will be breaking loose here inside of ten hours, let alone ten days. We ought to clear out before it comes, or stand by Maggie and fight."

"Bare-handed?" asked Grimm, sneering. "Do you think our pistols will do any good if that horde from town attacks? Looks to me as though our princess of Eldorado might better give up her gold and her rule over a people who don't want her, and buy a way out for all of us."

THE words burned deeply, and Ernie unexpectedly flared up. Maggie's eyes were flitting from one to another of us; she somehow reminded me of a kitten treed by a gang of dogs, as she fingered her green robe and sat tensely antagonistic. Then Ernie, who had deliberately angled for all of us, and got all of us on the hook, bowled us all over with scathing words.

"You're a fine lot of men! Fritz and Grimm pulled a good job yesterday, but the urge seems to have vanished. Now the lot of you are showing your true colors, thinking only of your own selfish aims and ambitions! Fritz, I'm downright ashamed of you."

And this, only an hour or so after she had wakened me with a kiss! The amazing untruth of her words, as it seemed, the injustice of them, was staggering. Bill James started to speak, but Ernie waved him down. Her sapphire eyes were glittering angrily at us.

"Grimm, you needn't sit there sneering; you have a pretty small heart, after all. Now you're in and find it's no bed of roses, all you want is to get out quick. Oh, sure, let Maggie buy your way to safety! Even Bill is one step ahead of you there. None of you realize the truth. None of you see there's only one person here who's really unselfish."

"You, I suppose?" rapped out Grimm.

MAGGIE struck in with an angry word, but checked herself instantly. Ernie rose and went to her, slipped an arm around her, and the two of them walked off. We sat staring at one another, rather blankly.

Bill James was the first to speak. "Has she gone off her nut? What's she talking about?"

"Search me." Grimm scowled at us, his coppery eyes ablaze. "Fred, can you savvy what she's driving at?"

I lit a cigarette and nodded, for that last remark of Ernie's and her departure with Maggie, had given me the clue. After all, I knew her pretty well.

"The gal has her sights elevated a bit higher than we have, I guess. Remember what Maggie is now, and what her background is. We've figured her wrong, and Ernie has realized the truth, that's all."

"Elucidate, wise guy," rasped Grimm, who was in a dangerous mood.

"Maggie doesn't give a hang about this place, the gold, anything else—so far as she's concerned. Her idea is to make Bill head of the whole works here; a petty king, with the world at his feet! Get it?" I was enthusiastic with the force of my own discovery. "That's why she wants to keep Bill here. She can give him something he can't get anywhere else, and she's savagely determined on it. Wealth, power, security, high position! But not for herself, mind. Probably she doesn't give a damn for all the gold in Mexico."

"Holy smoke!" gasped Bill James, his eyes wide.

Grimm uttered a harsh laugh. "You may be right. By the lord, I believe you are! Bill, do you want to be king here?"

"No!" said Bill, fervently. "You can have the place and everything in it."

"Thanks. I do, and it's mine," said Grimm calmly, but his eyes were not calm. "What this whole place needs is one strong man, with brains. We'll not bother about the gold. At full load, a man can only carry about five thousand dollars in gold; let that ride till later on. Our first move is to get out of here. Then I'll come back with about a dozen men of the right stamp, and you'll see some action—"

"Easy, now, easy!" I broke in upon him. "You miss the point of everything. First, we have to make Maggie see that Bill does not want all this."

"I've told her that a million times," said Bill James, perplexedly.

"Never mind. We've got to get behind her, work for her, fight for her!" I went on. "That's what Ernie was trying to make us see. None of your damned selfish grabbing, Ed. Lay off. Maggie doesn't want to go home with Bill as a beggar, but as a queen."

GRIMM let out a savage wolf-growl. "If it wasn't for this hip, I'd settle you in short order!" he said, looking at me with fiery eyes. "What do you want out of this?"

"Nothing," I said. "Or rather, Ernie."

He drew back his lip in a snarl. "Yes. She's worth a dozen of you. She ought to be queen of this place!" He checked himself, relaxed, and reached for a cigarette. "Well, we're stuck here for a few days anyhow, till Huacho gets on his feet and I'm nimble again," he went on more calmly, and even managed a smile. "No use crossing water till you reach the bridge. Ernie's right. You're right, Fred. Get behind Maggie, eh? Right. Fight off any attack, renew her authority if possible, put her in position to offer Bill wealth and power. Then, when we're ready to clear out, Bill can nobly refuse it all, take Maggie to his bosom, and she'll be content to go with us. Is that it?"

His cynical mockery brought a flush to Bill's cheek, and infuriated me, but I kept my temper and nodded.

"I think that's about Ernie's idea, Ed. Do we play the game?"

"Yes," said Grimm.

Bill James assented. "Yes, by all means. Ernie may be right about it."

"Understood, then." I rose. "Bill, what about a swim around the island? Not you, Ed; no swimming for a few days, with that slash on the mend."

Bill joined me on the ramp. We slipped out of our robes, took to the water, and stroked along to the wide front of the house, and the stairs where we had first arrived. Two of the servants were here, obviously on guard, since each one had a rifle. They flung us a wave of the hand and a grin.

"Good humored, these Aztecs of yours," I said. "Bill, I didn't know you had any rifles here!"

"We have six in all," rejoined Bill. "But damned few cartridges—a dozen rounds for each rifle."

"Not so bad; things are looking up. I feel we've got some place on our agreement."

"Maybe you do," he grunted. "Don't like Grimm's attitude, though. Hello!"

One of the two guards was calling something. We struck in closer to the wide stone stairs. The sun was in the west, and the misty vapor had thinned out considerably. The line of shore was dimly visible, and the bulk of the pyramid-temple; a few boats were far out on the water, all with paddles, since there was no breath of wind, but none of them were near the islet.

The two guards were excited, however. They were pointing at something behind us, away from the town; we discovered a dugout craft with two paddlers, heading in from that direction. More excitement, then a name which caught my ear.

"Moctzin!" I repeated, and trod water to see better. Sure enough, in the stern of that craft was the queerly shaped man

I had seen on the temple ramp, big head, small body, very wide shoulders. He grinned and waved a paddle at us.

"Come on," said Bill, striking out. "I'll talk with him. That's the lad, all right. Must have paddled out from town and circled away around. Not a bad sort, all told."

The paddlers paused; the bow man was a beady-eyed Indian. Seen close up, Moctzin was brown and stripped, his features strongly chiseled and intelligent. We swam alongside the dugout, and Moctzin exchanged a few jocular words with Bill; then he struck into graver speech, and Bill gave me a startled look.

"Fred! He says that he's come to talk with the two gods who rescued Huacho!"

"He's wise, is he?"

Moctzin, watching us quizzically, broke into a laugh and talked some more.

"Sure is," commented Bill. "Says he recognized the costumes; he had seen them here in the house. Better play the cards as they lie."

"Okay," I rejoined. "Tell him to come along to the patio, if he wants to talk business. Your men can bring him, and get Maggie as well."

Bill complied. We struck out again, and Bill called to the guards that Moctzin was to be brought to the patio. We swam on around to the ramp and got into our cotton robes. Ed Grimm was where we had left him, and greeted our news with alert interest.

"Fine! Give us the lowdown on this guy, Bill, before he gets here."

"He's a bad actor, but not like the other two," rejoined Bill James. "More human, less extreme. He's been on the outside and speaks Mexican. He has the priests behind him and the better class of Indians, but only the minority. I'd say that he had nothing to do with torturing Huacho. That was Peyotl's gang. We might get somewhere, talking with Moctzin."

"I'll say we might," exclaimed Grimm. "Divide and rule! Here they come."

MOCTZIN was not impressive standing, but when seated, with his big shoulders and head, he took the eye and held it. Bill introduced him, made no secret of the fact that Grimm and I had done the job ashore, and Moctzin congratulated us laughingly. Bill interpreted.

"He says you saved his neck. Peyotl was going to jump his crowd last night, but that business halted everything. The brown devils think the gods are against them. Peyotl's trying desperately to powwow them into action, and they're holding back."

Maggie arrived, without Ernie. Somewhat to my surprise, she greeted Moctzin smilingly, and he went to one knee, touching her hand to his forehead. For one moment he was the humble Indian, but only for the moment. He was courteous, good-natured, affable, but held his seat as though it were a throne. If he lacked the savage force of Peyotl, he made up for it in dignity.

He wanted to see Huacho; he had conceived a great admiration for the Yaqui. Promised the chance later, he settled back and got down to business. Bill James, sitting beside me, gave me and Grimm the gist of what was going on. The talk veered from Indian to Mexican and back again.

Moctzin put his cards slap down on the table, admitting that he was in a jam. He had the temple, Peyotl had the town, but this island was the key situation and he wanted it. Without it, he did not have sufficient men to come to grips with Peyotl in a struggle for power. With the

place, which contained the gold Peyotl wanted so badly, once in his hands, Moctzin promised a speedy end to hostilities.

His facile gestures, his animated countenance, made an interpreter almost unnecessary, as he explained his plans. He wanted to get his men here secretly, then make a swift raid and sweep all the boats from the town, which would leave Peyotl temporarily unable to attack the island. With our aid, and with Maggie's men added to his own, he would then circle around to the valleys behind the town and burn the corn crops. This would bring the bulk of the Indians to terms at once.

"In which case," said Maggie, "they would starve none the less, and your side also."

Moctzin chuckled. "No, lady," he said with respect, "for there is plenty of gold in this house. We could send to San Tomas and buy food to last till the next harvest."

"Then you want the gold, as well as the island?"

HE MADE a deprecating gesture. "This gold will buy everything our people must have. We and our fathers mined it; your fathers kept it. Now it can serve the common good. Give me your help, and we need have no conflict; I'll meet you halfway in everything, will be your faithful servant, and you'll retain the power and the rule here. Refuse, and I must then attack you, for this place means life or death to me and those who obey me."

Instead of flaring up, Maggie surveyed him thoughtfully. Grimm spoke out eagerly; this was, at least, one solution and worth considering. Maggie gave him a slow, scornful glance and then spoke in English, which our visitor did not understand.

"You do not know this man; he is not like the wild bull, but like the snake."

"That's right," said Bill, while the glittering eyes of Moctzin searched us. "He has a bad name for treachery. Once he got his claws gripped here, he'd cut our throats."

"Apparently he will anyhow," I said. "Why not parley with him, till we make up our own minds just what we want?"

It was my turn to feel her scorn. "Are your minds not made up? You want to go. Very well. You shall go. All of you, except Beel. I'll arrange with Moctzin; he will see that you are sent out in safety. Yes?"

Yes or no? Here was decision; it had to be swift and instant. Grimm's chance to get outside and make his plans to return. My chance and Ernie's to get out, and then arrange Bill's rescue with government help. Here was everything we wanted, or had thought that we wanted. Even Grimm hesitated.

"Cards down," I spoke out. "I speak for Ernie. We stay here, Maggie; we're back of you to the finish, win or lose. We'll talk later about going. For the present, we'll see you through the scrap."

"And I speak for Huacho," said Grimm quietly. "We stay. We're at your service."

She was startled, tremulous, affected so deeply that for a moment she lost her cool poise. Emotion leaped in her eyes; gratitude, relief unutterable—then she was herself again, remembering the visitor. She turned to him, smiling a little.

"Give us three days to consider the matter, Moctzin."

"Three days?" Moctzin reflected, speaking his thoughts aloud. "Peyotl cannot attack me before the time is up. You have rifles; I need them. He has only a very few left, I have none. It is worth the risk. Yes. Three days; it is agreed. Now let me see the Yaqui, since I have brought him a present."

HE WAS taken to Huacho, and presented him with something he had managed to obtain ashore—the keen, deadly little hatchet which the Yaqui loved

above anything on earth. Then, in the shades of twilight, Moctzin departed, paddling out across the lake to circle and gain the shore and the pyramid-temple under cover of darkness.

Three days. He would come, he said, on the third evening for our reply.

In those three days, suspense and crisis waned, hard feelings died, and all of us were apparently knit more closely in friendship. Ernie confessed that I had read her ideas aright; she was joyous, a vibrant eager thing embracing us all in delighted gayety, for now Maggie had become a totally different person.

Even more than Ernie, she was like a golden flame in house and patio and garden. She had cast aside her cool suspicion. She sang, swam with us, loosed herself without restraint, and became a girl untroubled and unafraid. The presence of Ernie, whose real friendship and affection she now felt, aided tremendously in this result.

Huacho, up and about, disdained his hurts, and so did Ed Grimm. We took stock of our defenses; Grimm was all for taking some swift, desperate action on our own part, in case Maggie's decision went against Moctzin. For we left the decision to her.

We had two pistols, with a few spare clips. Those of Huacho and Ernie had gone into the lake when they were captured. Six rifles, old Springfields, with a hundred rounds of ammunition for all six. No more. Of native weapons, bows and spears and clubs, there was no lack, and of men to use them we had twenty, with half as many women.

Those Aztecs—for they were really of Aztec and a little Spanish blood—were deft, smiling people, not over-intelligent, hating the brown Indians bitterly, and devoted to Maggie. They would fight, according to Bill, like fiends. Grimm got them armed, divided them into watches, and arranged that a constant guard be maintained, day and night, with one of us always in charge. Weapons were placed in readiness against emergency, the precious cartridges were apportioned, and with affairs on a systematic basis we felt ready for anything.

The third day waxed and waned. The mist was entirely gone. The shore line, the town and temple, the fields of nearly ripe corn, were clearcut and close to the eye, but showed little activity. Sunset drew on, and there was no sign of Moctzin; no boat was anywhere near the islet. The priests and Indians swarmed on the pyramid top and the long ramp, for their sunset devotions; raucous horns were blown, voices chanted, twilight fell. We ate our evening meal in the cool flower-filled patio, and were oppressed by the waiting.

"Oh!" The voice of Maggie startled us with its sudden exclamation. "I know! You've not seen the cellars! Beel, shall we show them the cellars?"

"Good idea," approved Bill, brightening. A lamp had been brought, for darkness now enveloped us. "Where's Grimm?"

"On watch," I said. "Went out in front."

"Then I'll relieve him; the cellars are no treat to me." Bill rose. "Maggie, you can do the honors. Gold, my friends! Gold such as Uncle Sam would clap you into jail for owning! And other things. Huacho, old boy, you'll see enough to knock your eye out down below!"

He swung off, laughing. Presently Grimm rejoined us, with word that all was clear; if Moctzin came, we would be advised. None of us had asked Maggie what her decision would be, until now. Grimm put the question to her, and she smiled.

"I'll tell you—down below," she said, catching up the lamp. "Come along! The entrance is over in the far corner of the garden; it's well hidden."

We trailed along after her. Ernie, I noticed, hung back, looking again at the lovely patio in the starlight, at the flowers, sniffing the perfumed air.

"Anything wrong?" I asked. She turned to me.

"No, my dear. Nothing's wrong. Yet everything's wrong. I don't know why; this place just seems too sweet and lovely and peaceful to be true. Come on!"

So we went, to our glimpse of Aztec gold and other wonders; but I remembered Ernie James' foreboding when, after so terribly little time, the peaceful patio rose once more before me amid the reek of blood and hideous death.

X

WHEN we followed Maggie—or, as Huacho respectfully termed her, Señorita Sanchez—to the subterranean crypt, we had not the least inkling of what awaited us.

None of us, supposedly, was armed, for the weapons were all ranged in the huge lower room of the house where they could be seized at any alarm.

Maggie, giving Grimm the lamp, parted a dense clump of bushes, a little past the fountain near the ramp; it must have been about the center of the islet. Here was disclosed an ancient stone god. At least, it was a stele six feet high, all four sides heavily carved, and set on a stone pedestal. In front of this were three small ones, a couple of feet in height. Maggie beckoned me and pointed to the center one of the three.

"Pull on that one. Pull hard!"

I obeyed, and the stone slab moved. It slid forward; and as it did so, the big carved column slid backward. When I straightened up, the column and pedestal had moved back to leave an opening some three feet square. Ernie exclaimed in surprise, and Grimm chuckled.

"Fred, weren't we saying something when we came here about engineers having been nonexistent? Here's the answer. Simple, efficient and secret. Do your people know about this, Maggie?"

"Beel knows, I know, no one else," she replied. "Only the Sanchez family knew. You are my friends. You shall see."

Taking the lamp from him, she went to the opening. Steps led down, steeply, and I counted sixteen as we descended. At the bottom she paused. From a shelf she took another lamp, this one of pottery with a cotton wick, lit it from the first, and gave it to Huacho to carry. Thus, we had light in plenty.

Here, too, was a long copper handle or lever protruding from a slot in the wall. Again Maggie beckoned me.

"Lift up on it," she said. "It will close the opening."

The idea of entombing ourselves was not pleasant, but I obeyed. The job took strength. The lever suddenly gave, there was a crunch and a slam above, and we were shut in. I noted that Grimm and Huacho were exchanging a few low words, and supposed that the Yaqui was objecting to the procedure. If so, I agreed with him. Ernie did likewise, for she shivered and reached for my arm.

"Moral support, Fritz, and let's have plenty of it! I never appreciated your bulging muscles as I do now. All right, Maggie, we're ready for the worst."

Maggie laughed and went ahead of us, her lamp high; we followed, with Grimm and Huacho bringing up the rear.

Here was a passage, a very short one, with a hanging curtain at the end, a curtain old and fragile and in tatters. As she put it back, Maggie wave us word of explanation.

"There are plenty of legends about this place, of course, since many men worked on it, but that was far more than a hundred years ago. All my family are here except my father, who wanted to lie elsewhere. The water has risen since this was built; now it is over us."

Pleasant thought. Ernie gripped my arm tighter.

Beyond the curtain, the passage continued, but with recessed niches on either side, like small arches in the wall. These

reflected a dull glint, and at a sudden exclamation from Grimm, our guide came to a halt with one laconic word.

"Gold."

She pointed to one arch, not bricked up solidly like the others. We peered into the recess and saw the bricks piled there, unevenly. Bricks, yes; bricks of solid gold. The other niches were filled flush with the wall. This one was half full.

Huacho was quite impassive, nor did it strike me as anything very wonderful, at first. Ernie broke into excited speech, forgot her fears, and insisted on getting out a gold brick and scratching it; she was like an eager child, and Maggie laughed heartily at her display of animation.

Glancing at Ed Grimm, I got a shock. He, too, was playing with one of those gold bricks, and although he had not uttered a word, he was in a perfect flame. His coppery eyes blazed like fire in the lamplight, his nostrils quivered, his big hooked nose jutted like an eagle's beak; with the sprouting mass of white hair that covered his head, he looked uncommonly similar to a bird of prey. His veneer of cynical detachment was stripped away and the real man was revealed, fiercely dominant, unscrupulous, bitter hard. Then, looking up, he caught my eye and his expression changed.

"You're seeing something," he said, forcing a smile. "There's enough gold here at Roosevelt prices to jolt the world market! Or so it would appear. Possibly one exaggerates with enthusiasm. At least, we're looking at millions. How much is here, Maggie?"

SHE shrugged carelessly. "I don't know. It's all in the book."

"What book?"

"The big printed Spanish book with the blank leaves at the end. All that was put here, whether gold or people, was written down."

"Where's that book now?" shot out Grimm, thrusting his head forward.

She eyed him curiously, as though astonished and wondering at his avid interest.

"In the house, on the table by the stairs in the big room. Why?"

Grimm drew back, conquered his excitement, and tossed the brick he had been holding into the niche again.

"Take it, if you're pleased with it," she said rather scornfully.

"Thanks. Not yet," said Grimm curtly.

"What did you mean about people being put here?" I asked, to divert her attention. She looked as though Grimm's attitude irritated and angered her, as it very likely did. At my query, she turned to me with a quick smile.

"You haven't guessed? But I told you already! Come, then, and look for yourselves."

Ernie, with a sigh of reluctance that was more real than assumed, put back her own heavy brick of gold, and we went on to another curtain. This bellied a little, and air made the lamps flicker, so it was obvious the crypt had some other outlet or air vent.

Just before reaching the curtain, Maggie stopped and pulled open a heavy door in the wall.

"The ones who came here first were Christians," she commented. "That is, of my family. It was forgotten long ago."

A little room, a tiny chapel, very crude; merely altar and Crucifix and a few trimmings. Bare, pitifully eloquent of what the first comers here had brought and their children had entirely lost. Grimm, who had queer scraps of knowledge, muttered something about such a chapel being illegal anyhow, from an orthodox point of view, whereat Maggie gave him one look and turned her back.

Huacho, oddly enough, who made some pretense of being a Christian, dropped on his knees and crossed himself, muttered a prayer, and got up again. That queer wedge-shaped head of his, with the glittering eyes, had a proud, high set. Ernie noticed it, and nudged me.

"Our blanket Injun looks like a chief, Fritz," she breathed, as we filed out.

"Why not? Yaquis have chiefs," I said. Then, as we passed the second curtain, my voice died out. None of us spoke, or even moved, for a long moment. We just looked. No words were needed. We understood perfectly that we stood in the presence of the Sanchez family; not many generations are required to cover a span of two centuries.

Here we had more space—an eight-foot ceiling, a chamber thirty feet long and twenty wide. Two immense pillars of stone, apparently upheld the ceiling. The floor was of stone, and empty except for the two pillars.

All around the sides of the chamber were recessed niches, high and low, and in each niche was a coffin.

Some were of stone, some of metal—obviously copper, being tinted to a beautiful Pompeiian green by verdigris. It was extremely damp in this big chamber. The stones were moist, and showed huge patches of lichen or fungus growth.

"Are the gold and copper mines still worked?" asked Grimm rather absently, as though he were far away in thought.

The question came as a shock, so foreign was it to the place and the thoughts inspired by what we saw. All of us regarded him curiously.

Maggie frowned, then replied rather coolly. "They were until my father died. Since then, no. The Indians refuse to work any more, as the copper piled up in the storehouses is of no good to anyone, and they want a share in the gold."

"I don't blame them," said Ernie. "None of the metal is any use here; and they deserve a share of the gold. Feudal days are over. Or do you refuse to admit it, little princess?"

MAGGIE met her dancing eyes and broke into a laugh.

"Of course I admit it! What do I care about all this useless gold? With Peyotl, however, it's a question of life and death, of power, of slavery!"

"That fellow would make a good totalitarian; he simply wants everything," said Grimm. He seemed tense, as though repressing inner excitement. "One could do business with Moctzin, however. Have you thought about your answer, when he comes tonight?"

"Yes," said Maggie, and fell silent on the word, deliberately refusing to gratify his curiosity. Grimm compressed his lips, as though his anger were difficult to contain. Then, after a moment, Maggie gestured toward the far end of the chamber, and went on.

"You'll see, down there. I'll tell you then what you want to know."

She moved away. We scattered, looking at the tombs, or rather coffins. Those of copper showed no inscriptions. Those of stone had preserved their markings; names, and in two or three cases a cross. Huacho, with his lamp, moved like a gigantic shadow, bare feet silent. He was wearing a robe like the rest of us, and looked queer in the white cotton garment.

"Anybody staying here very long would get galloping consumption and no mistake!" I observed. "It's devilish wet. Any danger of the lake breaking in?"

"Yes," said Maggie, and the unexpected word made us all jump. "Come, I show you."

We joined her, close by the entrance. I noticed, in passing the two huge pillars, that chains were set in them, with manacles

dangling; but I took for granted that these relics of barbarism were rotten with rust. And before I could mention the chains, my thoughts were abruptly diverted.

The lamplight showed us a six-foot recess in the wall, empty of any coffin. From a slot between two of the stones projected a heavy bar of greened copper, angling high; the slot indicated that the bar could be pulled down.

"Hello!" I said. "Another lever for me to put my weight on?"

"No, no! Stop!" Maggie exclaimed quickly. Her exquisitely carven features were alert and alive with energy. "Pull that down, and we'd all drown! This bar moves out a block of stone from the wall and will let in the lake."

For a moment we were silent, staring at her, at the bar, at the wall.

"If it still works!" spoke up Grimm, with an undisguised sneer. "You can't tell me that copper mechanism will work after a century or two of disuse and dampness!"

"It works. Everything here works," said Maggie, looking at him. "The other bars work; you saw. My father kept everything greased. Pull down this bar, and the lake comes in."

I COULD sympathize with Grimm's cynical thought, if not with his sneer. In other days, this flooding proposition would have been effective against any recovery of the gold, but not in this day and age. With a mere shallow water helmet, a diver would make short work of bringing out this flooded treasure.

"Now you see," went on Maggie. She became fluent, animated, earnest. "I do not have to give up the gold to anyone! In one moment I can lose it all. Pull down the bar, and there is time to reach the entrance—just time. Then, even if they found the secret of this place, it would be all water. They could not get the gold. I can do this if anything threatens—anything!"

AS SHE spoke these words, her eyes went for an instant to Grimm, eyes challenging and angrily direct. Afterward, I wondered whether she had perhaps sensed some subtle warning from his manner, which was certainly unusual. The sight of that gold seemed to have affected him in a marked degree.

"I can still fight," she went on. "I'm not as helpless as they think. I can save this gold for Beel—even at the worst. You see? I know he can come back later on and then rescue it. That is why I will not listen to the snake Moctzin."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, with a start. "Then you've definitely decided against him?"

"Absolutely," she rejoined firmly. "We have more guns than all the rest of them; our people are faithful and will fight. You are with me, you are backing me; when you told me this, it changed everything! Moctzin will never dare attack us here. When he comes, I shall refuse to listen and order him away."

"Bully for you!" cried Ernie with vibrant enthusiasm. She looked at Maggie, her lovely face in a glow. "You have what it takes, and we're with you!"

Grimm pushed forward.

"Will nothing change this resolution of yours?" he demanded.

"Of course not," said Maggie.

"You're a fool!" he exploded vehemently. "All this fine fighting talk isn't worth a continental damn. They can starve us out, they can do a thousand things. We can't attack them—yet we must take the offensive, we must! Alliance with Moctzin offers all we need!"

"I think, Ed, the gal's right," I put in mildly. "Right or wrong, I'm with her, and so are you; so take it calmly and help her play her own game."

Grimm gave me one burning, savage glance.

Then he shrugged and turned away, fished out a cigarette, and lighted it. In the glare of the match, I saw him looking fixedly at Huacho, and thought he

murmured something, probably a smothered oath.

He stalked over to the nearest pillar, and caught one of the dangling chains; there were two to each pillar. He examined it with an air of curiosity, and then looked up. His whole manner had changed. He was now as calm and affable as he had just been dynamic.

"Hello, look at this!" he exclaimed. "You were right, Maggie; the copper does seem to have been greased. I don't suppose the things still work?"

"They work, if you know how." Apparently, Maggie was glad to have the crisis over, and approached him. Ernie and I crowded forward to see. "That is, they snap shut; you have to have the key to open them."

Holding one chain and manacle, Grimm caught up the other and examined it.

"Well, these don't seem to work," he rejoined. "What were they used for?"

"Oh, long ago the people were punished by being kept down here—away back in the early days," said Maggie. "They were blindfolded, brought down here, and left locked.

"It was too cruel. It has not been done for a hundred years, my father said. Here, I'll show you how the thing works."

She gave her lamp to Ernie, and turned to the pillar. Grimm looked up at me, grinning.

"Take a look at this, Fred," he said. "It's good."

I came close. He shoved one of the manacles into my hand, then turned to Maggie, who was showing him how to work the other. Sure enough, the thing was fairly well greased. A loop of heavy copper, which slid down into a catch, making a crude but highly effective handcuff.

Grimm laughed suddenly. I heard a click, a startled exclamation from Maggie —then Grimm had caught my wrist and the manacle, had slipped it over, had clicked it shut. All in a split second. I never saw anything so swift, so perfectly timed; Ed Grimm was a very efficient fellow.

He stepped away, chuckling, puffing at his cigarette. I never suspected anything wrong, even when I saw Maggie, who was ironed like I was, swing around and stare at him from eyes wide and tragic.

"Enough is enough," I said, unable to get my hand loose. "Come on, open up, Ed!"

Grimm waved his cigarette. "Gladly. Maggie, where's the key?"

"Hanging there by the door," and she nodded toward the entrance. Huacho stepped over, holding up his lamp. We saw the big key on a hook against the wall. Huacho took it and gave it to Grimm, who pocketed it. Then he turned and looked at us.

"Well?" spoke up Ernie, impatiently. "Let them loose, Ed, and let's get out of here."

"Wait a minute," said Grimm. "I have a few things to say."

THEN, suddenly, I realized it was no joke. With an oath, I tugged at my chain, and nearly tore my hand off. Nothing else.

"Easy, Fred," said Grimm. He was suddenly crisp, tense, commanding. The force of him leaped out at us. Huacho had set his lamp on the floor, and from beneath his robe pulled out an automatic pistol—one of our two. Grimm, I knew then, had the other one.

Grimm turned to Maggie. "My dear Señorita, you are a most beautiful young woman; but when you try to play a man's game like this, as I told you a moment ago, you're a fool. What this place needs is a master, not a pretty girl. What these Indians need, what Peyotl needs, is a master. And what the situation needs, is action—not unselfish nobility or high chivalry, but action, savage and direct. A combination with Moctzin, in other words, and a sharp, swift push against the other crowd."

"Damn you, Grimm!" I burst out hotly.

"If you're trying to make us do as you want—"

"Not you, Fred, not you," he intervened, with a wide grin. "All I want you to do is to keep still; and you're where you'll keep still."

Ernie started to speak, but Maggie forestalled her.

"Very well," she said quietly. "Your little trick has worked. And you, Huacho, turned against me, against us all! You serve your master, yes. Well, Grimm, tell us what you want. I agree. I am helpless. What can I do? What do you want?"

Grimm tossed away his cigarette. He took a deep breath, and I could see his coppery eyes glinting and flaming.

"Everything," he said, and looked at Ernie with sudden exultation. "This place, this gold, this country! And the right person to share wealth and power. I have, in less academic language, taken over the whole works."

XI

I WAS too stupefied to say anything; what he uttered was incredible. The two women stood gazing at him.

Huacho, upon the silence, gave his croaking laugh and made one of his rare speeches.

"The time to say what you want is after you have it."

Grimm gave him a glance. "Eh? What d'you mean by that?"

Huacho merely cackled again and waved his hand around the place, as though to say that the situation spoke for itself. I saw no particular sense to his words, and neither did Ed Grimm, who eyed him frowningly for a moment, then dismissed the matter and turned to us.

"Now I suppose we must have things out. Ernie, you can forget this brawny halfwit," he said caustically, jabbing his thumb at me. "I've been wild about you from the first moment I saw you, so make up your mind to the inevitable."

"Don't be a beast," said Ernie in a low, tense voice. "Have you gone crazy?"

Grimm laughed. "Is that your reaction? You'll think better of it later. Señorita," and he swung around toward Maggie, "I regret this necessity. You'll not be held here long, I assure you. As soon as Bill James listens to reason and everything up above is under control, we'll reach a working arrangement. You've nothing to fear."

"You could do nothing to make me fear," she said with a certain contempt. "So this is how you keep your promises! This is how you support me! I thought Moctzin a treacherous reptile, but you are far worse."

"Your English is improving," said Grimm. "What, Fred? No heroics, my fine fellow? No bellows of rage because I take the woman you can't hold?"

His thin, sneering disdain maddened me, but I was giving him no satisfaction whatever.

"Sing high while you can sing," I said. "By God, this is the worst day's work you ever did, and I'll prove it to you when the time comes!"

He looked at me an instant, and nodded. "I believe you mean it, Fred; but the time's far away. Now, I've a clearcut plan of action to lay before you. I'm sending Huacho to the outside, and within a week I'll have a dozen men here, by plane. Until then, I'll combine forces with Moctzin; we must strike a blow at Peyotl at once, before sunrise!"

He paused, lit another cigarette, and smiled.

"None of you will be harmed—if you're reasonable. Ernie stays here with me. All the rest of you get sent home, and you can squawk your heads off when you get there. The gold? It'll be sent with Maggie, to whom it belongs; at least, a large share of it. Further, she will derive royalty from the mines here, after I get them reopened. In our country, my golden princess, this yellow metal will give you and

your Beel far greater power and pomp than any you could give him here."

Maggie gave him one look of scorn and held up her fettered wrist.

"You snake! Do you think your arguments can do away with this?"

"Oh, you'll not be here long," Grimm said easily. "Just as quickly as I get things all settled with your Aztecs and Bill James, you'll come back to your own house—on parole, of course. No hardships, to those who don't make it hard for themselves," and his eye touched lightly, sardonically, on me. "Huacho and I will go topside and leave the three of you here for the moment; the key, of course, goes with me. As soon as we've arranged matters, you'll be freed, so just take it easy and resign yourselves. Ready, Huacho? Leave 'em the lamps. Rip down that curtain and we'll have light enough."

Huacho tore away the ancient curtain at the end of the passage, and the two of them departed, the ring of Grimm's footsteps echoing from the corridor.

Ernie set down the lamp which she still held. Raging, I worked at the manacle, at the copper chain, but could do nothing with either. Maggie gave me a word, a gesture.

"It was made to hold strong men; wait."

A laugh rang out. Grimm had come back to the passage entrance.

"You bet it was made to hold!" he observed. "I forgot to say, my dear princess of the Sanchez line, that if you have any regard whatever for the life and safety of your Beel, you'll just continue to do nothing. Hostage. You get the idea."

He departed again, and this time did not return.

We waited, silent. After a moment, we heard the rasping crunch of the pedestal and stone block being moved away. Grimm's heels rang on the stone stairs, a gush of fresher air came into the crypt. Then, presently, the scrape and crash of the upper stone falling back into place. We were entombed once more.

I looked at the two women. Ernie was bewildered, hurt, stricken, but to my astonishment Maggie was laughing. Her mirth was excited, eager, almost hysteric, but it was mirth.

"The key!" she exclaimed. "He never tried. He never tried it!"

"Oh, he's got it, all right!" I said. She laughed again.

"You don't understand! Ernie—here, here! You can get it!"

"Get what?" Ernie demanded.

"The key to unlock us! What Grimm took was the key of the chapel door. The key to these chains is hanging on the other pillar, in plain sight. Get it, quickly!"

Ernie uttered a quick cry and came to life. She darted at the other pillar, then was back, in a flurry of excitement; she fitted a key into Maggie's wrist-ring, then into mine. The metal clicked. We were free.

"Princess, my hat's off to you!" I exclaimed admiringly. "That was the slickest thing ever pulled! Now we'll get upstairs and spoil his little game. Wait; you girls had better stay here. Grimm and Huacho have the pistols, and this is going to mean shooting. Isn't there anything here to serve as a weapon?"

MAGGIE went to one of the coffin-niches and pulled out an old coiled whip.

"Take this," she said. "It was used for punishment in the old days."

Stiff as the leather was, it made a brutal weapon. I started for the passage, but Ernie scooped up one of the lamps and hurried after me.

"You needn't think for a minute we're going to stay down here alone!" she cried. "I'm not, anyway!"

Neither was Maggie, and I wasted no time on arguments. All three of us hastened along the passage. When we came to the bar, and the steps beyond, I put my weight on the lever. With a scrape and a crunch, the overhead slab moved away,

and I was up the steps two at a time. They followed me closely.

The clear serene starlight was gone. True, the moon was just rising, but her light also was paled. All around was a ruddy glare, and an infernal din of noise. Yells were pealing up, guns were exploding, frightened shrieks shrilled on the night. Bewildered, incredulous, we came to a halt, but only for an instant.

A surging rush of figures struck us, scattered us. I was sent staggering and reeling. Wild yells burst up from close by. Two men appeared whirling torches into a blaze, and around me showed Indians, stripped and bloody. One of the Aztecs was being stabbed to death in front of me, and the Indians sighted me as I became aware of them. Two came darting for me with knives lunging.

I lashed out with the whip. They screamed and leaped away. Then, unable to get any sight of the two women, I was plunged into a vortex of frantic and furious struggle that bore me toward the patio, where more torches smoked. Louder rose the yells. All in a moment, I had been pitched into a chaotic world, and it was either fight like a madman or go under.

Abandoning all reason, I fought; and no other weapon could have served me as did that brutal whip. With enough strength behind it, the lash cut and slashed, covered a lot of ground, cracked like a pistol-shot. By racial inheritance, too, those Indians dreaded a whip. I tore into the lot of them, being too panicky to do anything else. Not until I got into the courtyard, did I begin to comprehend what it was all about.

This lovely place had become a hell, and was well lighted, both by moon and torches. I stumbled over bodies, and with an access of horror recognized two of the Aztec women servants, frightfully stabbed. As I staggered, a number of brown figures rushed at me. Somehow I fought them away, lashing, striking with the loaded butt, cutting at their faces. I caught a brief glimpse of a figure in uniform crossing a lane of light—Peyotl, yelling at someone, in his hand a knife that was running red. Then he was gone.

Peyotl! And we, like fools, had thought ourselves safe from him for days to come, purely on Moctzin's sayso! Ed Grimm, after all, had seen the situation aright.

The next surging rush bore me into a corner, where I was left forgotten while another of the Aztecs was pulled down and his head hacked off. Fighting was going on all around. The Aztecs, or what remained of them, were in little clumps, surrounded by swarms of brown Indians; men and women alike, they were taking a heavy toll of death, bowstrings twanging, weapons flashing. Here and there a clubbed rifle showed that the cartridges must have been used up. The attack had doubtless broken just after Grimm and Huacho left the crypt. I could see nothing of them, and there was no further shooting.

But, suddenly, I saw Bill James. He was back in an inner corner of the patio with three Aztecs, all stripped to the buff; around them was a ring of slain, and outside that, a ring of Indians yammering at them. Two of the Aztecs were using bows, the other had a sword, and Bill himself had one of the Spanish rapiers. Apparently Peyotl's men had come depending on cold steel alone, for none of them used a bow; the ring was closing in on the four. Even as I looked, the Aztec with the spear was dragged down in a whirl, and although the attack was broken, he remained dead.

I woke up. All this had taken but a few flashing seconds. Knowing that as

soon as I got their attention, the Indians would come for me, I went at the crowd surrounding Bill. It was a pity that my lash was not a killing weapon, but it did draw blood at every stroke. I was on them before they knew it, slashing right and left. They broke, screaming. A yell came from Bill as he recognized me; then, just before I won through the scattering press, he went down and lay sprawled, motionless.

A FINAL stroke to right and left, the lash cutting and curling across the brown faces. An Indian came leaping at me, and I brained him with the heavy butt and was through, besides the two Aztec bowmen. Behind me a rush was gathering. I stooped, caught up Bill's rapier, and learned what it was to go berserk.

The press of Indians drove in over the dead. I lost my head; that heavy Spanish blade seemed no more than a feather. I was as crazy drunk with the battle-madness as any Indian there, and went into the mob thrust and slash. The two Aztecs were cut down. The melee raged around me, or rather I raged in the middle of it—slipping in blood, standing on bodies, striking, cutting, thrusting in a furious sobbing insanity of fight.

And, suddenly, it was all over. The brown devils were drawing back, opening out. I wiped the blood and sweat from my eyes, blinking at them as I gasped air into my lungs. The ruddy smoking torches made everything clear and distinct. The yells sank down, here in the patio. A single figure stepped forward, facing me, hand upraised in the universal peace sign.

It was Peyotl. Blood had splashed his remnants of uniform, and blood trickled from a scalp-wound down his cruelly powerful features. He addressed me harshly, his voice firm and penetrating, but his words made no sense to me; I shook my head.

"No savvy," I panted. "Try English."

He started to speak again, and checked himself, looking down. The savage brown faces murmured, and the wild eyes flickered. I followed their look. Behind me, Bill James was lifting himself, was coming to one knee.

"My lord, Bill! I thought you were dead!" I exclaimed. "Hurt?"

He looked up. Before he could speak, Peyotl ripped out a flow of language. Bill came erect, somewhat shakily, and stepped to my side.

"Slipped, came down on my jaw, damned near broke it. Knocked out," he muttered. "That devil offers us terms. Says he'll shoot us if we don't give in."

Peyotl grunted, and emphasized his grunt by jerking his pistol from its holster. At a chorus of exclamations from behind him, he swung around and gave a curt order. Other figures moved forward, a little group of them, and Bill James gripped my arm.

"Done for!" he said, in a groan.

A burst of savage, exultant voices lifted and died again. Maggie was pushed into the light, a man holding either arm; blood was spattered on her green robe, and so terribly white and stricken was her face that I knew she must be desperately hurt. Then Ernie was dragged up. A hoarse cry escaped me, and I forgot all else in frantic anxiety; Bill's hand tightened on my arm, his voice checked me.

"Steady, old man, steady! We need headwork here."

CONTROL came hard. Ernie showed more indications of what must have happened than did Maggie. Her golden-bronze hair was disheveled, matted with blood, hanging about her face. Her robe was ripped away, except for a remnant about her neck. Her white shorts were blood-dabbled, her body showed welts and bruises, and a knife-gash along her left shoulder and upper arm was dribbling blood. Knowing Ernie, I realized what a terrific fight she must have put up. She shook back her hair to show her face bruised and bleeding from blows.

"Steady," said Bill again. "Listen, now."

Peyotl was speaking once more, addressing us. Bill replied to him shortly, and he went on at length; beneath the man's evil power, I divined a certain earnestness, even anxiety. From the other side of the island, where the Aztecs lived, came yells and a shrill scream, but silence had fallen in and about the house, and more Indians had crowded into the patio until the torch-flares lit a sea of glittering eyes. The moon was high, now, and her soft radiance bathed everything in silvern horror.

Bill turned to me. I was astonished by his quiet poise; it was the calm of desperation.

"Get this," he said. "Peyotl has the place and us, but its cost him a terrific price. Say the word and he'll shoot us down; he means it, never fear! We haven't a chance. He'll give us one, and I advise grabbing it while Carnero is gone. He's off attacking Moctzin, and he's a fiend if there ever was one. Peyotl uses his head, however. He offers us life and security; says that he wants to make use of our knowledge—"

He was interrupted by a stir, a murmur, a gasping cry from Ernie. Without a word, Maggie had slumped down in a dead faint. Ernie uttered frantic words.

"Help her, Fritz! She's wounded—a spear stab in the side. She needs help!"

Bill's hand tightened again on my arm, as I started.

"Hold everything! Peyotl will shoot if we move. Yes or no? You speak the word. I can't. You see, he promises Maggie nothing. She's his property, right now. He gives Ernie to us."

His voice broke. I saw that he was quivering, but with sheer fury. His eyes were all ablaze. He was the old Bill James come to life, but in control of himself. Sight of Maggie, stretched out there, held him gripped in iron bands.

I dropped the rapier, which was stuck fast to my hand with blood.

"Okay," I said wearily. "Bargain for immediate attention to Maggie's wound. We have that first-aid kit still, if the house hasn't been looted. Tell him I can take care of her. We don't want any medicine-men fussing over her."

Peyotl, who was stooping above Maggie in evident anxiety, showed instant relief at Bill's reply. Apparently he wanted nothing better than to have me look after her.

He straightened up with a crackling flood of orders. Indians flooded forward, searching me and Bill for hidden weapons and finding none. Maggie was lifted carefully and carried into the house. Ernie was turned loose, and came to us with sobbing haste.

"You don't understand!" she exclaimed. "She's really hurt, badly hurt; we'll have to attend to her at once!"

"Right." Bill turned to Peyotl, who was watching us with his attentive, beady stare. At his words, the Indian nodded and flung out more directions.

"All set," said Bill. "They'll bring water, bandages, whatever we need. He's coming, too. Let's get going. I gather that we'll occupy our upstairs quarters as usual. Where's Ed Grimm?"

"Damn Grimm," I said bitterly. He gave me a look of surprise; he knew nothing of the coup that Grimm had sprung on us. Before Grimm reached him, the attack had come unexpectedly and swiftly, from all directions. Peyotl had moved boats up around the island, unseen. He had sent his chief aide, Carnero, to attack Moctzin and the pyramid-temple, which accounted for our having heard nothing from Moctzin; the chap had waited too long to contact us.

As we passed into the house, which was also littered with dead and wounded men, Ernie turned to us. She had caught the name of Grimm.

"He was hurt," she said. "I saw Huacho lifting him into a boat, back there at the ramp; I don't know what had hap-

pened. Huacho was lifting him in and shoving out. It was all vague and shadowy —just a glimpse. Perhaps they got away."

I damned Grimm again, and went up the staircase with Peyotl, while Bill followed with Ernie; she briefly sketched the happenings in the crypt, for his benefit. I confess to a fierce satisfaction that Grimm's big play had been nipped in the bud, for at the moment I hated him with my whole heart and soul. In reality, we would have suffered far less from his treachery than in our present situation. Looking back from the turn of the stairs, I saw two wounded Aztecs dragged into the big room below, and butchered. They had been wiped out to the last, men and women alike.

WE GATHERED in the big corner chamber that was Maggie's bedroom; it was my first glimpse of the place. There had been no looting or killing upstairs, and things were untouched. Everything was very simple here—a pallet on the floor for bed, a few cushions, pottery lamps in queer shapes—yet it was a riotous blaze of color. The sculptured walls were tinted, and heavily inset with gold. In fact, gold was everywhere in the room, and the loot of this one building would have made any man rich for life.

Ernie, who had hurriedly donned a fresh robe, held a lamp close to the figure on the floor-bed. Bill and Peyotl followed me to Maggie's side; the Indians remained grouped near the door. Bill had procured the first-aid packet, and waited.

It was no time for false modesty, even had such a thing been known in these parts. I cut away the ripped green robe and the blood-soaked underthings, with a knife Peyotl handed me, a knife still stickily thick with Aztec blood. When that lovely golden body was laid bare and washed clean of blood, the damage was revealed. There was a long and ugly gash from the left hip almost to the armpit, and a second stab, more dangerous because deeper, under the left shoulder-blade.

As an amateur surgeon, with pitifully scant equipment, I was pretty much up against it, but went to work with everything I had, thankful the girl was unconscious. I got the wounds cleansed, stitched, bandaged, and spoke to Bill as I worked.

"She'll need care. Ask Peyotl whether any of the Aztec women are alive."

Peyotl sent two of the Indians to find out, then gave us a sample of his primitively savage disposition. I will say the man was deeply stirred by the sight of the hurt girl, and possibly his feelings for her mounted above mere barbaric lust. At all events, I had just finished the bandages when an Indian stepped out from the crowd and Peyotl cracked something at him. Bill translated.

"Here's the chap who stabbed Maggie; says it was a mistake. Peyotl had given orders that she was not to be touched."

Peyotl took one step, his hand moved, his pistol exploded with a roar that drew a stifled cry from Ernie. The Indian, shot through the brain, collapsed. Peyotl ordered the body removed and swung around to Bill, who listened and nodded.

"Says to give whatever orders are necessary. They'll be obeyed."

A STIR, a slap-slap of naked feet; a woman was pushed forward, a young, golden-skinned woman half insane with hysteria and horror. She was the only one of the Aztecs remaining; they had slaughtered man, woman and child. At sight of Maggie, she flung herself down and broke into vibrant sobs, clinging to Maggie's hand and kissing it. Bill James spoke to her and she proved only too willing to take her post here. There was no more I could do except arrange to be called if needed, and to give orders about food. Peyotl, who was bringing over his own staff from town, spoke earnestly to me and clapped me on the shoulder.

"He says you're a great guy," translated

Bill James. "You made a tremendous impression by the way you fought. They want to know where Huacho is."

I had no idea, and said so, and then swung around to Ernie.

"Hello! You look like hell. Now it's your turn—there's enough iodine and gut left to attend to your hurts, my dear. Come on, let's look at them."

She drew back. "Not here, you blessed fool! Not in front of everybody! I could scream at the very idea! And I'm the one to nurse Maggie."

"After a day or so, sure. But right now you need attention," I said. "Honest. We'll have to do it quickly, because I'm just about ready to keel over myself."

We adjourned to the next room, where Ernie had her few possessions. There, alone, Bill and I got her fixed up as well as possible. Peyotl sent an Indian with a little box of healing salve that the brown devils used on their own hurts, and deciding that it could do no damage, we made use of it. The stuff, in fact, had miraculous effects.

Bill came next, and he was pretty badly battered. As for myself, I had a lot of minor scratches but nothing of any moment. When he and I went to our own room, I was all in and just dropped on the pallet.

There were guards at the doors, and we were under close watch, but nothing mattered.

"What's going on?" I asked, hearing a loud burst of voices from outside, and quite a chorus of yells. Bill, who sat with his head in his hands, jerked up and listened.

"Something about Carnero," he said listlessly. "Seems that he caught Moctzin by surprise and has captured the temple."

"And what might have been Paradise is now bloody hell," I muttered.

Bill groaned and lifted a tragic face. "Thank God Maggie got spared!" he said. "If it weren't for that, Peyotl—"

"Shut up. Turn out the light and go to sleep," I broke in, and, with another groan, he obeyed. But even the moonlight was hideous, this night.

(Part III in the next SHORT STORIES)

A WORD FROM CADDO CAMERON

MR. CAMERON has this to say about his story on the opposite page:

"When planning a story my first step is always the selection of a main actor or two—as the case may be, and the yarn itself—more properly its theme, is founded upon and grows out of one or more character traits or peculiarities with which I have endowed my hero or heroes. Probably a reader doesn't give two whoops about how an author writes a story, but I did feel I'd like to say that about *"Them Damned Twins Is Insulted,"* since the yarn is intended to portray the influence of one of the most pronounced character traits found in Southwestern pioneers of the '70's and earlier—blind loyalty to family, friends and outfit.

"To those who may possibly feel that Paint and Pinto herein espouse an unworthy cause, I must point out that this trait of character did not always direct its host along paths of rectitude. My father fought through a bloody countyseat fight in which he had no interest other than to back his friends who were vitally concerned. His father never owned a slave and was opposed to slavery, but he was killed in the Southern army because the South was his outfit. History is filled with instances where some poor cuss paid for his sins at the end of a rope or in the smoke of a lawman's gun, simply because his brother or maybe his forty-second cousin needed help in h'isting a bank or in making a get-away after he had robbed one.

"Inasmuch as this character trait exerted such a powerful influence upon life in the Old West, I don't feel that we writers who at least make a pretense of authenticity should side-step it when it encourages our heroes to do things which, viewed in the uncompromising light of strict morality, are not exactly proper."

CADDO CAMERON.

What I Mean—Everybody Better Ketch A Holt and Hang On When—

Them Damned Twins Is Insulted

By CADDO CAMERON

Author of Many Exploits of Paint and Pinto Hawkins

Chapter I

"WE GOT THE WHOLE DAMNED TOWN ON OUR TAILS!"

TWO young riders reined their ponies to a halt and scowled up at a signboard posted on the trunk of an old oak near the trail. Pinto Hawkins read the warning, snorted indignantly and read it again. Afterward he turned his long bony face toward the town sprawled on the north bank of the Rio Grande a mile or so ahead and gave it a look that was a belligerent challenge, pure and simple.

"Betcha me and that there town don't get along wuth a damn," he growled to his twin brother Paint, "and what I mean, I'll deal the dadblamed place plenty misery if we don't."

Whereupon Paint—an exact duplicate of Pinto, the whole rawboned six feet of him even to the last dark brown spot on his densely freckled face—slowly read the sign aloud:

"GUN TOTERS BEWARE!
SURRENDER YOUR WEAPONS TO ME WHEN YOU ENTER OUR CITY OR SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES
WILLIAM ARMISTEAD WOLF
MARSHAL OF BORENDO, TEXAS"

Paint shoved his old hat over one eye and scratched his straw-colored head. "That's plumb insultin', no two ways about

it, and I'm dead shore that Mistah Bill A. Wolf ain't no Texas man."

"Huh! You cain't tell. Texas is chock-ful of wolves."

"Sartinly," admitted Paint, "but Texas wolves is po-lite. If a Texas man was to write him a sign like that'n, he'd make shore to say 'please.' "

PINTO shifted his hard blue eyes from his brother to the notice. He drawled sarcastically, "I reckon you'd a-writ it 'please be-ware', and 'please surrender,' and 'please suffer.' Fiddlesticks. I'd *still* be insulted."

From infancy these freckled twins had been at all times ready and willing to start an undeclared brotherly war over anything or nothing at all, provided they were currently at peace with the rest of the world. However, when trouble threatened either or both of them they got along beautifully —thinking alike, acting in such perfect unison as to give the impression that each could read the other's mind.

Here was a chance for a nice argument which Paint seized upon quickly. He growled, "And I wouldn't give a hoot if you was insulted. You couldn't noways do nothin' 'bout it."

"I'll show you what I could do," calmly retorted Pinto.

He purposefully hung his quirt on his saddlehorn, but the sign again caught his eye before he went any farther. "That is to say," he added thoughtfully, looking off toward town, "I'd thrash you here and now if we didn't have a job of work to do. Don't want to cripple you down 'cause I may need you to load my guns."

"Huh! You mean you'll need me to keep this here Bill A. Wolf from rippin' yo' hide to saddle-strings," placidly declared Paint. "Betcha he's the jasper the Old Man told us about, all right."

"Yep, he's Canadian Bill shore enough," agreed Pinto, "and I recollect old Lum sayin' that Canadian Bill talks and looks and acts big, and he ain't all bluff neither. But that there sign is a bluff and I aim to prove it."

"Me too. Lets us mosey on."

Holding their matched bay ponies—Bacon and Beans—to a slow walk, the twins discussed important things and made daring plans. They were now on the pay-roll of Lum Jackson's Six W, a cow outfit with headquarters south of San Antonio, one hundred seventy-five miles away, and were making this long ride to rescue the Six W caporal—a sort of straw-boss over Mexican cowhands—named Tomas Terreros, who had somehow landed in the Borendo jail while returning from a short visit to his native land. The vaquero who had accompanied Tomas and later brought the bad news to the home ranch had been somewhat vague as to details of the caporal's doings, but he left no room for doubt that his friend was charged with all manner of serious crimes, none of which he had committed. The rollicking young Mexican's loyalty to his friends and his outfit had passed more than one severe test and after the fashion of their breed, Paint and Pinto Hawkins and old Lum Jackson would back him to the limit—right or wrong. It didn't make a particle of difference to them whether Tomas deserved to be in jail. They intended to get him out, legally or otherwise; and having been insulted by Marshal Wolf's warning, the twins were now disposed to look upon legal procedure as a thing to be avoided if at all possible.

AFTER carefully reviewing their employer's final instructions, the twins figured they could do mighty near anything they felt like doing and still be carrying out orders provided they released Tomas.

For the fiery old Lum had given them two hundred dollars, and said, "Go fetch me Tomas. Pry him loose or steal him from that there Canadian Bill Wolf and get on a spree with this here money, or use it to buy him out if you cain't do no better. I don't give a damn how you do

it just so you make 'em all-fired sorry they ever jailed one of my boys. Now slope, and don't you dast come back without Tomas—durn his cussed hide!"

While their ponies ambled down the trail toward town, the twins laughed about how old Lum had carried on.

Observed Paint, "The Old Man jest as good as put a bounty on this here Canadian Wolf's ears, which suits us puffect."

"I'll tell a man it does!"

They hadn't gone far before the trail burrowed its way through a thicket which rose well above their heads. After making sure that no one was in sight, the boys rode into the chaparral and dismounted. They went in wearing two six-shooters and a bowie knife apiece and came out a few minutes later with no sign of a weapon on their persons. The four guns were inside their shirts under the waistbands of their jeans pants and the two knives were hidden in their boot tops. Their gunbelts were rolled up in the tarp-covered blankets that rode behind the cantles of their saddles, but each had taken the precaution to put ten extra cartridges in his pocket.

As they took to the trail again, Paint looked his brother over and grinned. "Durned if you don't put me in mind of a spotted-faced rooster that's been plucked a-plenty."

"And I feel thataway. Betcha I ketch my death of cold."

Paint glanced down at his own thin waist and narrow hips. "Me too. I feel so damned nekked, every time I see a woman I'll hunt kivver."

The first place they came to on the eastern edge of town was the Rio Grande Wagon Yard. The boys turned in, sort of wishing it was situated closer to the middle of town so a man wouldn't have to run so far to get his horse if he happened to be leaving in a hurry. They hadn't any more than passed through the gate before they saw Tomas' pony, a Six W buckskin with a black stripe down its back, in a stall eating hay as if nothing was wrong. For an instant the sight of that pony depressed them, called to mind how they had worked and played and fought with the jolly young caporal a-sidin' them and willing to go all the way, regardless. And they wondered how they'd get the little buckskin out of here when they needed him.

The twins ran into three men at the yard. One was the boss of the place, a huge old-timer with a white mustache under his big nose and a world of devilment in his large good-natured countenance. And there was a beefy individual, slovenly dressed, wearing two guns on his hips and a more or less dumb look on his red face. As for the third man—the boys looked at him and blinked to make certain that the brilliant afternoon sun hadn't given 'em a dose of spots before the eyes. But they soon found out that the spots were real, all right, for the big fellow was sporting a pair of leopard skin leggings and a leopard skin vest!

Paint looked at Pinto, and vice versa.

Their long solemn faces didn't change a particle, and when they again glanced at the man it was done with as little concern as if leopard skin *chaparejos* and vests were common on this Southwest Texas range. Furthermore, they took in the balance of his magnificence without a flicker of surprise; heavy auburn hair falling in waves to his broad shoulders from beneath a very expensive silver and gold mounted Mexican sombrero; a flowing mustache with a natural curl at its ends, a becoming decoration on a large and unusually handsome face; and a pair of prominent chestnut eyes that looked out upon the world as if they had it licked to a frazzle. The tall

man's adornment was completed by other clothing and rigging in keeping with the leopard skins. Naturally, he wore two ivory-handled guns and a pearl-handled knife.

A large gold badge on his vest said, "MARSHAL."

GREETINGS exchanged, the boys eased down from their saddles and ambled over to the group. The marshal accosted them before they had a chance to speak to the proprietor about putting up their ponies.

Eyeing them sharply, he asked in a deep voice, "Are you fellers strangers here?"

Pinto answered politely, "Yes sah, more or less."

The old yard boss' keen eyes fairly danced from twin to twin and he had the look of a man who expected pleasing events to pop up at any moment.

Standing with hands on his hips and feet spread, the marshal looked the lanky cowhands over from head to foot. "It looks like you ain't packin' no hardware, so I reckon you read my warnin' sign out there on the trail."

"Yes sah, Marshal," replied Paint, "we shore did and she's a right purty sign—easy readin'."

Pinto spoke up, "But far as we're consarned, she's jest a waste of good paint."

Canadian Bill's eyes narrowed a trifle. "What're you drivin' at?"

"You see it's like this, sah," solemnly answered the freckled liar, "we don't never tote no weapons 'cause our old pappy allows we're too young to monkey with 'em."

The old-timer coughed as if he'd swallowed a gnat or something.

Marshal Wolf's big jaw tightened. Evidently he harbored a suspicion that the twins were not as serious as they looked, that they might be poking fun at him.

He nodded to the red-faced fellow. "Search 'em, Buck, and comb 'em good."

Buck lumbered toward Paint. The tall cowman stood perfectly still with left hand on his hip, right hanging loosely at the end of his long arm.

Before the burly deputy touched him, he quietly told the fellow, "I'd a heap ruther you didn't try to curry me none 'cause I'm almighty ticklish."

Buck halted a yard away. He growled, "Don't give a damn how ticklish you are. Hold out your arms."

Again Paint calmly objected, "Sorry, Mistah, but I couldn't do it if I was to try. A bronc throwed and tromped me a while back and my shoulders and arms is so stove up I cain't hardly spit."

Meanwhile Pinto sidled around until he stood within arm's reach of Canadian Bill, and he did it so carelessly as not to attract attention to himself.

The marshal barked at his deputy, "Don't let him make a fool out of you! Search him!"

Buck shot out a stubby hand, seizing Paint's shoulder. The old yard boss afterwards gleefully declared that the gunman might just as safely have touched off a keg of powder. These twins had been trained to box by a broken-down pugilist in their father's outfit. A big bony fist whipped up and seemed to explode beneath the point of Buck's chin. Driven by a powerful arm and shoulder and timed with skill, the blow landed with a sharp crack and stunning force. The burly man's head snapped back, then he wilted to the ground as if there wasn't a bone in his body.

THIS encounter took place in the twinkling of an eye. Nevertheless, Canadian Bill's gun was half drawn when Pinto roared at him.

"Hold 'er!"

The marshal froze, whipped his eyes from Paint to Pinto.

The lanky cowhand had his right fist clenched and cocked. He grinned at Bill, glanced down at the fist, and drawled, "Looky here. I got one jest like his'n. It's a heap faster'n yo' shootin' irons and it's shore to muss up yo' face somethin'

scandalous. But, Marshal, I'd sorta hate to do it. Me and my twin ain't a-huntin' no trouble. We're the Hawkins boys, jest a pair of driftin' hands and we're the peace-lovin'est fellas you ever laid eyes on."

Paint quickly added, "That's a fact, Mistah Wolf, and jest to prove it we'll buy if you'll lead us to a place where a thirsty man can find hisself some salvation."

For the space of five seconds the marshal stood stock still, hand at his holster, regarding the twins with hard suspicion. There was something back of that look besides anger and they couldn't even guess what it might be. Meanwhile the boys held their breath, watching him, hoping he'd call off the war. It was fun to try to bluff Canadian Bill with a fist and the fear of what it might do to his good looks, but, should he decide to make a fight it would take more than a fist to tame a tough citizen like him and they didn't want to uncover their hidden weapons now; need 'em later on for much more serious work. The boys had an idea that Wolf would drop this searching business if he could think of some way to save his face, and they were trying desperately to help him out when the old-timer horned in.

He spoke in a deep voice that had a humorously judicial note, "I done read law in three different penitentiaries, so I know my law, and, Bill, I'm right here to tell you that you ain't got a leg to stand on."

The marshal glared at him. "You're crazy! I got a right to search these here pilgrims."

The old man's bushy white brows drew together and he stroked his chin with the solemn air of a jurist indulging in profound thought preparatory to handing down an opinion of great weight.

AFTER a short delay, he declared, "Maybe you have and mebbeso you ain't, but that ain't the p'int. Buck cain't search nobody legally. He ain't no law officer, never been sworn in. He's jest yo' private and pussonal thug, so to speak. Con-se-quently, by layin' hands on this here stranger he's done committed a assault and the young man bein' a free bawn citizen of our great commonwealth, he had a puffect right to re-sist by slippin' Buck a poke of powerful potency. Goda'mighty what a wallop he packs!"

In conclusion the old-timer threw back his white head and let out a roar of laughter that awoke animals dozing in the stalls. Buck stirred in the corral dust and painfully lifted his face out of a mule track.

The freckled twins laughed, too, but they did it a bit cautiously while keeping an eye on Canadian Bill. He grinned crookedly. In deep disgust he watched Buck struggle to his haunches and stop there, holding his head in both hands. Obviously the marshal was doing some deep thinking. The boys saw a crafty expression pass quickly over his face and wondered what he was cooking up. Presently he relaxed, took his hand from his holster, folded his arms.

He scowled at the twins in a superior way, and said loftily, "I've made up my mind to let you rannies off easy this time 'cause I can see that you don't know no better, so go on about your business and make shore to behave yourselves while you're in my town."

The boys thanked him and promised to be good. They remained where they were, however, and very much on the alert until he took Buck by the arm and led him to the horse trough. While the befuddled gunman was sousing his head the twins went about putting up their ponies, one or the other at all times keeping an eye on the marshal. Buck pulled himself together and got steady on his legs before the boys finished. With Canadian Bill at his elbow, he shambled over to where they were hanging up their rigging. His red face now showed splotches of white and his wicked little eyes were bloodshot and meaner than

ever. The twins grinned at him, said nothing.

He looked doubtfully from one to the other, and growled, "I don't know which one of you done it 'cause I can't tell you apart, so I'll jest let the pair of you know that this town will be too damned hot for you from now on. Savvy?"

The twins' freckled faces fell. They did their level best to look hurt.

Before either had a chance to answer Buck, Canadian Bill spoke up, "I won't order you to get out 'cause the tougher they are the better I like 'em," he announced grandly, "but I'm warnin' you to *look* out."

"Aww, now, Mistah Marshal," drawled Paint almost humbly, "what we all need is a drink."

"Exactly, my boy!" rumbled the old yard boss. "Words of wisdom from the mouth of a babe. Let's go!"

Often when in trouble, one of the twins would take the blame for something his brother had done. Pinto now solemnly told Buck, "Mighty sorry I'm so all-fired quick on the trigger and jest to show you how I feel about it, I'll buy a bottle for that there misery in yo' haid."

"Men, listen to that!" exclaimed the old-timer. "He allows he'll buy a *jug*. Let's go!"

"We're not drinkin'," curtly declared Canadian Bill, "but you-all go ahead and get tight and I'll have you locked up before mornin'."

He and Buck left without another word. The boys and the old-timer, who said his name was Joe Loftus—Rio Grande Joe—silently watched the officer and his companion stalk through the gate and away toward town.

Paint pulled a long face, and innocently inquired, "D'you reckon he means it?"

Rio Grande Joe twirled the off side of his mustache and grinned. "Yep," he answered, "Wolf means every word of it, so I calc'late you boys better not do any drinkin' while you're in Borendo."

The twins' eyes met for an instant. Each nodded.

"I'm dry," said Pinto.

"Me too," said Paint.

FIVE minutes later the three men paid a visit to the Oxbow Bar. This was the first of a series of similar calls which used up the balance of the afternoon and carried them into all parts of the town so that the twins got pretty well acquainted with the place. But they didn't get tight. In fact they made it a point to stay practically cold sober, realizing that before morning they'd need clear heads and steady nerves.

Meanwhile by judicious inquiries and close listening, the boys learned many things about the inhabitants of this wild border community, particularly its marshal. They found out that Canadian Bill Wolf held the tough element in the palm of his hand, Mexicans, breeds and Americans alike, bossing the town over the opposition of Rio Grande Joe Loftus and his smaller following of good citizens. The old man had little to say about the situation and was especially cautious when speaking of the marshal where he might be overheard.

While making the rounds Paint and Pinto avoided any reference to Tomas and the purpose of their visit, notwithstanding their anxiety to learn what charges were lodged against their Mexican friend. As Paint said when they were alone in the Metropole Saloon for a moment, "'Tain't safe to ask any questions and it's shore damned dangerous to answer 'em."

The boys were somewhat puzzled by two things: the fact that Rio Grande Joe left his business to his hired man so as to spend so much time with them, and why they never once heard anyone mention Tomas, even in crowded places where men were talking as they will when drinking. This town wasn't too large to take notice of a prisoner in its jail. Ordinarily in a place

of this size, he would be a topic of conversation and the twins were bothered by the knowledge that he wasn't. No two ways about it, they kept thinking, there was something wrong and old Tomas was smack in the middle of it.

It was getting late in the day and Pinto concluded that they simply had to find out what was up, somehow or other. The three men had just drifted into the Mesquite barroom and taken chairs at a table near a front window through which they could look diagonally across the street at the adobe jail.

Pointing it out to his brother, he drawled, "Yander's the old calaboose. Shore hope she ain't crowded when the marshal locks us up tonight."

Paint eyed the place carelessly for a moment. "'Pears to me we'll have plenty room to spread our blankets." He turned to Rio Grande Joe, and asked casually, "Plumb empty, ain't she?"

The old man shook his white head. After a quick glance about them, he frowned thoughtfully through the window at the jail.

"Not by a damned sight," he said cautiously. "They got a young Mex in there. His name is Tomas Terreros and I like his looks. Wolf allows that he's fixed to prove that the pore cuss knifed Jose Ruiz and Pedro Hernandez a while back. Maybe he done it, I don't know. But I do know that them two killers were the dirtiest skunks that ever hit Borendo and they'd oughta had their throats cut a long time befo' it finally happened to 'em."

Pinto shrugged his wide shoulders. "Well, I reckon it won't be the fust time we've had to sleep with a Mexican knifer."

Suddenly Joe Loftus leaned forward with his elbows on the table. He spoke rapidly, softly, "Make shore to stay outa that there jail tonight, even if you have to fight like hell to do it!"

The twins' hearts beat faster, but their long freckled faces remained solemn and unmoved.

Paint inquired blandly, "How come? Strikes me you got a right comfortable jail here, a good cheap place to sleep."

Rio Grande arose to his great height. His keen eyes swept once around the barroom, then dropped to the twins who had remained seated. "Lets us get outa here," he rumbled. "I been talkin' too much with

my mouth. Anyhow, I gotta go back to the yard."

So the boys parted with the old man, grateful for the tip he had given them at no small risk to himself. They'd like to know more, of course, but wouldn't ask. If he cared to tell them, fine; if not, they'd make out with what they already knew and could guess. Before leaving them on the sidewalk in front of the saloon, Rio Grande quietly remarked that a man could get his horse from the yard at any time of the day or night inasmuch as he slept in a small room that tied onto the feed bin.

The sun was sinking behind some barren hills in the west when Paint and Pinto started down the sidewalk alone. Under more favorable conditions they would have seen many things to laugh at while rambling through this adobe town on the banks of the Rio Grande, for it was a picturesque place swarming with all manner of colorful people; but this evening they saw danger in everything and everybody. Although there wasn't a weapon in sight, they'd gamble that this crowded street was armed to the teeth; and to feel that they were marked men in such dangerous surroundings provided a thrill of anticipation that was not altogether unpleasant. So they ambled along outwardly careless, but secretly on the alert and ready for anything to happen—sort of hoping it would.

The twins were passing the Adobe Saloon when two Americans stumbled from the doorway arm-in-arm. One tripped and suddenly the pair of them barged into Paint, knocking him violently against his brother. At the same instant the strangers jerked guns from beneath their shirts. Meanwhile Paint had flicked a glance through the barroom window.

"Whoaup!" he snapped at Pinto as they staggered.

Whereupon the Hawkins boys did an astonishing thing. Instead of going for their hidden six-shooters, they folded their arms and grinned at the men who had them covered.

"Grab iron!" snarled one of the strangers, a wiry red-headed fellow.

"Go for your guns!" growled his partner, a large swarthy man.

Neither of the twins made a move. Apparently they were utterly calm, but their stomachs crawled while they stood there looking into the muzzles of guns in the hands of half-drunken toughs who might be out to make reputations for themselves as badmen.

"Sorry, strangers," drawled Pinto, "but we ain't got nary a gun to our names."

"That's a fact," added Paint. "We're plumb peaceable and don't never pack the things."

EVIDENTLY this turn of events caught the gunmen by complete surprise and they didn't know what to do about it. Each looked sheepishly at the other, then Red stole a glance into the saloon.

Pinto chuckled.

Paint called through the barroom window, "Mistah Marshal, you and Buck come out here and tell these gun-totin' jaspers what peace-lovin' fellas we are, will you please sah?"

Canadian Bill showed up at the door a moment later. Behind him the twins caught a glimpse of Buck and several other men. They had almost walked into a trap! For an instant their blood ran cold at thoughts of what would have happened to them had they put up a fight.

Bill Wolf proved to be a bluffer from away back and the boys grudgingly gave him credit for the play he made. Without a moment's hesitation he whipped out both guns in a draw that was so smooth and fast as to give Paint and Pinto food for thought.

He covered the gunmen, and growled fiercely, "Buck, com'ere! Go take them weapons away from Red and Blackie."

Regarding the two toughs reproachfully, he went on to say, "I figgered you fellers to be friends of mine and here you are goin' heeled in my town when you know good and well that it's against the law. It's gettin' so a officer don't know who he can depend on."

Naturally hot tempered and filled with the pride that helped to make the cowhand of that day the salty individual he was, the twins struggled with an impulse to give this crooked marshal a big laugh, for they knew that he had framed them. Tomas' predicament was all that kept them from doing it. As it was, they solaced themselves by faithfully making certain mental promises that had to do with Canadian Bill's future peace of mind and bodily welfare.

When Buck had disarmed the gunmen Pinto turned his solemn face to Wolf, and sternly declared, "Mistah Marshal, these here wild and woolly badmen done insulted us clean through and through, so I claim we got a puffect right to take 'em out behind the saloon and sorta talk things over with the polecats. What say?"

And Paint cut in quickly, "You're durned tootin'! I betcha a jedge would tell you that's powerful good law and fust-rate jestice."

He paused, gave Red and Blackie a look that scorched them from head to foot, and concluded, "What I mean—when we finish our talk with these here gun-slingers you'll be shed of 'em permanent. Jest gether the pieces and plant 'em, that's all."

The twins meant every word of it. What they said may have had a humorous twist, but their voices were edged. In a cooler moment they had decided upon a strategy which required them to keep their weapons hidden and humbly take whatever came their way; now they were getting burnt out on it. Humility didn't agree with them. They were aching to fight back.

Red and Blackie didn't seem to be particularly worried and Canadian Bill looked a bit uncomfortable, which bore out the boys' conviction that he was at the bottom of this thing and wouldn't dare to turn them loose on his gunmen. His answer confirmed their guess.

He said in a sullen way, "I don't need nobody to help me get shed of gun-toters and, besides, you rannies will have all you can do to behave yourselves. Go on about your business if you've got any, and *see* if you can stay outa jail."

This threat was a straw that came near to making their burden of insults unbearable.

Paint looked at Pinto, and vice versa.

"Be-have yo'self!" snapped Paint.

"You too, damn it!" barked Pinto.

THUS each cautioned the other to control his temper, which made them madder than ever. They lit in to quarreling and totally forgot to say something ornery to Canadian Bill before they left him. Paint prodded Red out of his path with a sharp elbow, Pinto shouldered Blackie aside so violently he wound up against the hitch-rack and they stalked away from there arguing about whose temper was forever and eternally getting them both into trouble. At the corner of the Borendo Hotel their walk stopped, but their quarrel continued.

The jail frowned at them from directly across the street—an old adobe affair with walls a yard thick and windows that were too small for a man to crawl through, not to mention bars fit to hold a tiger.

Pinto jerked a thumb toward it. "Take a good look at that there dungeon," he growled. "That's where we're due to land if I don't get me a hammer and chisel and ampitate yo' temper."

"Huh!" retorted Paint. "When you go to ampitatin' you better start runnin' at the same time simultaneous."

He let his gangling frame sag back against the corner of the hotel and regarded the calaboose with the practiced eye of a good judge. "Strikes me that ain't much of a jail when you put it up ag'in some of 'em we been throwed into and busted out of."

As often happened with these high-strung twins, their quarrel now temporarily became nothing more than a pleasant memory.

Pinto propped his long body against the wall near his brother. He, too, eyed the jail critically. "Calc'late you're right about that," he agreed, "but you gotta recollect that we ain't never had no leopard-skinned marshal a-ridin' a close herd on us while we was locked up."

"No we ain't, damn his insultin' hide!" muttered Paint, "and befo' we show this here town our dust, I betcha we make him chaw and swaller them spotted leggin's hair side out."

Pinto whispered a quick word of caution. For a moment thereafter his keen eyes swept over the men and women coming and going on the sidewalk, the riders and vehicles moving in the dusty street.

"That's what we'll do, all right, but this ain't no fit place to talk about it," he said quietly. Then he raised his voice, "Too damned many jackass ears a-floppin' 'round."

With his concluding sentence he fixed his gaze upon a slender, dark-complexioned man who had been lingering nearby. The stranger dropped his tobacco sack and slowly stooped to pick it up. Paint recognized a face that he had seen behind the marshal when the trap was sprung. A spy—another insult!

He jerked his hat down over one eye

belligerently, folded his arms, and drawled lazily, "Stranger, I cain't he'p but notice how all-fired long it taken you to bend down and straighten up. If you've done wrenched yo' back I know somethin' that'll take the stiffness out in no time."

The shock of discovery more or less unbalanced the spy. He dropped his tobacco again and looked timidly at the twins before stooping to pick it up. After glancing ahead and behind him as if measuring the distance to a safe place, he muttered, "Got a touch of rheumatism, but a little more hot weather will take it out of me."

Paint grinned, but the glint in his long blue eyes made it painfully clear that it wasn't a friendly grin, and his voice carried a sting, "Then you better go to hell in a hurry. They got hot weather and no rheumatiz down there. Git!"

The spy left there without another word or a backward glance.

FOR the space of five seconds Pinto eyed his bellicose brother in astonishment, genuine or a fine imitation. Then he said gruffly, "Come along with me, you ring-tailed wildcat! Gotta get you off'n the street befo' you clean ruin our reppitations for bein' peaceable twins. Damned if you ain't got the cussedest temper I ever seen on man or beast."

Which might have resurrected the quarrel if the boys hadn't gone inside right away and got into an argument with the hotel proprietor about whether they could have a room to themselves. He wanted to put them in with two other men so as to save the room for a married couple or two women, since it was the only one he had left.

A weazened old-timer, he had a sense of humor as well as an eye for business.

"Them other fellas is right clever boys," he insisted. "They're O Bar hands and they drawed some wages and come to town to get on a spree. I seen 'em 'bout a hour ago and they 'peared to be doin' what they set out to do, so chances is they won't come a-rollin' in much befo' day and you-all will have the room to yo'selves anyhow."

At the time the little office was pretty well filled by a white-haired old lady and her pretty black-eyed granddaughter, a drummer, a gambler, and a circuit-riding preacher, so the twins wouldn't think of giving in before such an audience. Moreover, they had to have a place where they could come and go in the middle of the night without attracting attention to themselves.

After venturing a sly glance at the girl, Pinto drawled, "Mighty sorry, Mistah, but it don't never do for us to bed down with strangers 'cause my twin walks and talks in his sleep and sometimes he tells things on hisself that I'm plumb ashamed to have folks know."

A deep red showed beneath Paint's tanned skin wherever his freckles gave it a chance, and from somewhere behind him there came a girlish giggle which didn't help any.

"He's a liar," stammered the lanky twin. "Truth of the matter is, 'tain't safe for nobody but me to sleep in the same stall with this here spotted razorback 'cause he busts up things."

"He does? How come?"

"He has fits!"

The old-timer shook his white head and snorted. "That settles it! You get the room. I wouldn't be ornery enough to put two sech liars as you in with a pair of honest drunks. Come on."

Situated at the rear end of the right wing in the one-storied U-shaped adobe, with a door opening into the *patio* and a window overlooking the river a hundred feet south, the room suited the twins perfectly.

Pinto quickly learned that by shoving his head out of the window to the limit of his long neck, he could look down the side of the hotel and into the door of the jail across the narrow street. A light was burning in there now and he saw Canadian Bill sitting at a table facing the door talk-

ing to four or five men—he couldn't make out just how many. One of them was Buck. He was seated on a cot or narrow bed against the wall. The lamplight fell across a cell door at the rear of the marshal's office, full-length bars. Pinto wished he could catch a glimpse of Tomas through those bars.

Meanwhile Paint had gone out to investigate the region back of the hotel. From the river almost a third of the way north to the wagon yard on the opposite side of town, there were only a few small outhouses behind the row of stores and saloons fronting on the street; and straight back east along the river, the nearest house was a hundred yards away. A huge pile of rubbish was heaped in the middle of this vacant ground, a sort of town dump, and it gave Paint the germ of an idea with which he was wrestling when he got back to the room.

FROM then until the clatter of a cowbell announced supper half an hour later, the twins sat and smoked and made plans with thick adobe walls to discourage spies and eavesdroppers. This matter of spies and traps had them bothered. They couldn't understand why the marshal was going to so much trouble on their account, unless he already knew who they were and what they were after. It didn't seem reasonable that their little set-to with him and Buck would call for a killing. Maybe Tomas or his vaquero friend, Carlos, had said something about them to someone in Borendo and if so, it would be easy for the marshal to spot them when they rode in. At any rate, they figured they'd better take it for granted that Canadian Bill had read their brands and act accordingly.

The twins made quick work of their supper, for it was getting dark now and they had to sort of keep an eye on things outside. Coiled down on chairs deep in the shadow of the hotel porch, well clear of light from door and windows, they smoked a lot and talked but little while watching what took place up and down the street and at the jail directly across from them. This waiting sure got on their

nerves. Had to go through with it though, because it was still too early to do anything. The moon wouldn't come up until late tonight, but a whole slew of stars were doing their level best to make it tough on a couple of fellas who craved darkness; and Pinto swore to himself that he'd never seen a place lighted up like this little mud town on the banks of the Rio. It seemed that every last house was pitching light into the street, and some of 'em had their back doors open and windows uncurtained so that they were lit up at both ends.

Paint idly watched an old Mexican come out of a little restaurant a short distance north on the other side of the street, with a flat wicker basket balanced on his head. The basket had a white cloth over it. He shuffled down the sidewalk toward the jail and Paint began to take notice. The old man went into the jail office and straight through to what looked like the cell door. Buck got up and slouched over there, and the cuss was so big Paint couldn't see around him. But he knew that would be grub for Tomas. The young cowhand's eyes strained for a glimpse of his Mexican friend—strained then softened, for after all Paint wasn't much more than a boy. It was kind of late and he'd bet Tomas was hungry. The ornery scamp shore did like his grub. From what Rio Grande Joe had said, this was due to be the old boy's last feed if they didn't get him out of that

damned place. Rio Grande just as good as swore they were fixing to mob Tomas, hang him more'n likely, then shoot him full of holes and leave him a-swingin'. Hot as blazes tonight, but Paint went cold for an instant. In his day he had run from one mob and shot it out with another. Hell of a thing, a mob!

Time dragged on. The stars came down until Pinto got to thinking that if a fella was dreaming a little he could reach up and grab one of the things, if he had any use for it. But he wanted darkness, a night that was plumb thick. There was six inches of dust out there in the street—silt, light as flour, but it wasn't doing any good because the air was dead still. Why in hell didn't the wind blow like it always blew down this Rio Grande valley and black things out with dust, and kick up a racket so a fella could do a little agitatin' 'round without getting caught at it?

And when was Wolf going to get out of that jail? Of course he wouldn't be in there when the mob showed up, so the twins had agreed to sit still until he left. It was beginning to look as if they might have figured him wrong and they were getting powerful fidgety, but he finally went out taking four men with him. Buck stayed there. He sat down in the chair behind the marshal's table and went to fooling with a deck of cards. Canadian Bill and his friends turned into the little restaurant. That wasn't far enough away to let a mob do its dirty work before he could get back to the jail, so the boys guessed that there wouldn't be any mob until he got through eating and went someplace else.

Paint leaned over close to his brother, and said, "Might be a good time to fetch the ponies."

"Good as any, I reckon."

They got up and ambled back through the office into the *patio*. There they paused briefly to exchange a few words with other guests before going to their room. Once inside, they lighted the lamp so that it would show through the crack beneath their door. Afterwards they silently climbed through their outside window and made tracks for the wagon yard, keeping well clear of the street, cussing a little now and then because the night wasn't darker.

Upon reaching the yard, the twins scouted the place thoroughly. Rio Grande Joe hadn't gone to bed, but he seemed to be alone in his room and they could discover no one in the corral or stalls. Paint slipped up to the old man's window and called to him. A few moments later he joined them in the darkness of a vacant stall.

"Now what the hell?" he rumbled. "Is they a posse on yo' tails?"

"Not yet," answered Pinto, "but cain't never tell what'll happen in this border country, so we're gettin' fixed to do some ridin'. What's yo' bill ag'in the three ponies?"

"Three?" The old-timer fingered his mustache deliberately. "As I recollect it, you wa'n't a-ridin' more'n two."

PAINT spoke up, "Make it three, Boss. That there Six W buckskin is a-lookin' powerful down in the mouth 'way out here amongst strangers and we feel sorry for the leetle fella."

Before Rio Grande could say anything, Pinto went on, "If you calc'late it'd look better and be safer all the way 'round, we'll tie you gentle-like and stuff a dirty sock in yo' mouth, but we aim to take the buckskin regardless."

"Not by a jugful!" growled the old-timer. "I'm rope-shy and I hate the taste of dirty socks. Take the damned buckskin!"

Placing a big hand on each boy's shoulder, he dropped his voice and declared, "The Mex that didn't get jailed went east in a mile-high cloud of dust, but he done a leetle talkin' befo' he left. I knowed you-all the minute you rid up. Shore wish I could he'p you, but I gotta live in this place 'cause every last thing I own is right here. Reckon I'll have to lay low. I'm

a-pullin' like hell for you, though, and if I got anything else that you need you're more'n welcome to it."

The twins spent some of their precious time trying to argue the old man into letting them tie him and take other measures to make it look like a holdup, but Rio Grande swore that no matter what might happen to him he'd never be that much of a coward. So the boys gave it up. However, each made a mental resolution not to leave the country so long as danger threatened this fine old-timer as a result of the help he had given them.

Paint and Pinto now moved fast. A few minutes later they rode away minus bullhide chaps which were too noisy for the ticklish work ahead of them, with their cartridge belts buckled on, their guns where they belonged and their holsters tied down. Paint led the buckskin by a hackamore. Old Joe said the marshal brought the pony in without saddle or bridle, claiming that Tomas was riding a naked horse when arrested. That sounded peculiar to the twins, but they couldn't be bothered about it now. If they got Tomas out of jail he'd ride the buckskin without a saddle all right.

The boys rode a circle west and south until they came to the river, then moved cautiously down it to a clump of willows a hundred yards or so back of the jail. There they fastened the ponies, being careful to put the Six W one far enough from Bacon and Beans to keep them from fighting and maybe giving themselves away.

The Rio Grande was low—a mere ribbon of water that a man could wade at many places, crawling sinuously over a wide river bed upon which sand drew ghostly figures in the night against a dark background of dried mud, while farther out starlight glimmered on the black surface of the slumbering stream. Seven-foot perpendicular cutbanks of rich soil marked the limits of the river at this point, in contrast to the towering walls of solid rock through which it sometimes flowed on its journey here.

The twins stood in the cover of the willows and listened. Over in Mexico a donkey brayed a forlorn protest against something and from near at hand his American brother answered in mournful sympathy. Not a leaf moved, the heat was wicked. And the night was quiet, too damned quiet! A feeling of dread momentarily crept over the boys, for they sensed that the voice of the town had changed. A while back it was hilarious, now it was sullen. Death stalked her streets and Borendo muttered to herself.

A mob was forming!

These inseparable twins now parted in the face of the enemy, a thing they rarely did. Pinto bent low, dashed swiftly to the back wall of the jail and crouched against it. Immediately above his head was one of the two barred windows in the unlighted cell. He caught his breath, listened, for he heard the musical voice of his young Mexican friend.

CHEERFUL, humorous, the flowery Spanish flowed so smoothly as to suggest that the speaker had never known trouble. "A thousand thanks for that grand food, Senor. After a meal like that and on such a night, a young man should go out singing and dancing and making love. Release me and we shall go—just you and I, Senor.

"Beyond the Rio Bravo beautiful women are weeping of loneliness, crying out for Tomas Terreros, The Vaquero. Come with me, Senor, and you shall have your choice of them, for my women obey me. Hurry, Senor Buck, before the Leopard returns!"

Buck answered gruffly in Spanish, "You will go dancing tonight, Greaser, dancing at the end of a rope."

Pinto clenched his big fists.

The next moment he heard Tomas laugh in that soft but light-hearted way of his, and he heard the caporal say, "But, Senor!

Think of your chivalry. Strangle me and you will break hearts in Mexico!"

The lean cowhand crawled away from the window, reflecting grimly, "By God, it takes guts to poke fun at hell thataway!"

He went around the corner and along the side of the jail to a bunch of careless weeds that he had previously noticed beneath the south window in the marshal's office. This was taking a chance and he wished it were darker, but he had to get as near to the door as possible. He stretched out behind the weeds, close against the wall, more concerned about his brother's safety than his own. He wondered how old Paint was a-makin' out. They'd worked in double harness too long ever to split up like this. Didn't hear nothin', couldn't see a damned thing! He'd shore give a pretty to know how old Paint was gettin' along.

In the meantime Paint was carrying out another step in their plan of action, having won the right to do so by the flip of a coin in their room. He dropped over the cutbank to the river bed and ran down stream to a point opposite the hotel. Here he climbed up and reconnoitered over the top of the bank with only his head above it. He knew where Pinto figured on taking cover and that was the first place he looked. In a moment he nodded with relief. Plenty dark over there against the jail. You couldn't see the big cuss behind those weeds, and if he'd just keep his long legs still he'd be all right.

Paint now took a look around to see what he himself was up against. The light in their room was still burning, low voices coming from the *patio,* not a soul in sight behind the hotel. Up and over the bank he went and away toward the rubbish pile as fast as his sinewy legs could take him. There he dropped and lay prone beside an old whiskey barrel, catching his breath and listening. Everything seemed to be all right, so he cautiously reached out and got a handful of straw from an old bed tick that somehow had escaped the town's hungry goats. After twisting the straw into a hard taper he lighted it, fired the rubbish heap in four different places and raced away from there.

Paint barely reached the river before the flames took hold and lit things up too brightly for his comfort. He slid over the edge of the bank and hung by one elbow for a moment. Pulling a six-shooter, he shoved its muzzle into a small bush so as to partially hide its flare and fired three shots. The roar of the gun jerked the town to its feet, the leaping bonfire set it to running. Yells split the night, "Fire!" and "Bandits!" predominating, for this border settlement was no stranger to raids. Horses plunged and snorted and squealed at hitchracks while drunken men tried to mount and escape from imaginary raiders. Cooler heads ran to the fire, armed and ready to make a fight. All over town doors were slammed and barred, and determined men took stands at windows with rifles and shotguns.

Paint raced back up the river bed. He grimly told himself, "Hell's done broke loose in Borendo and their damned old mob is busted wide open for a minute or so, maybe."

AT THE sound of the shot, Buck shoved his chair back and hurried to the door. Pinto heard him and slipped quickly to the front corner of the jail, drawing a gun. The reflection of the fire was, of course, visible from where the big deputy stood, but its origin was hidden by the hotel. He left the door and lumbered to the right toward the river where he would have an unobstructed view. The instant he appeared around the corner, Pinto took a quick step forward and lashed out with his gun. Its heavy barrel caught Buck on the side of the head beneath his hat brim, a vicious blow that would've knocked any man out. He wilted in his tracks without a sound. The tall cowhand caught him as he fell, dragged him back to the wall out of the light.

Pinto was frantically searching Buck's clothing when his brother showed up.

"Nary a key on him!" he growled.

"The devil you say!" exploded Paint.

The twins wasted no more words. Moving with that perfect accord which gave the impression that each could read the other's mind, they dropped to all-fours and swiftly went over every inch of the ground to where Buck had fallen. No key! Afterwards they ran into the marshal's office and shut the door behind them. Tomas shouted a joyful greeting through the bars. They barely answered. Each long bony face was set in deep lines of concentration. Their sharp eyes swept the walls and meager furniture.

Pinto barked in Spanish, "Where does he keep the keys?"

"Each Buck and the Leopard have keys," calmly replied Tomas, "and they keep them in their pockets."

Paint strode to the cell door. A crude affair but unbelievably strong, probably made by some blacksmith accustomed to repairing freighters' wagons which had to be stout. Tomas sent a stream of happy Spanish through the bars. Paint heard less than half of it. He studied the lock. Big and heavy like the door. A man might be able to shoot it off and on the other hand, he might merely jam it and never get it open. He abandoned the door as nearly hopeless considering the little time they had.

Meanwhile, Pinto stood in the middle of the floor, listening, interpreting the sounds from outside, making a swift inventory of the room; an army cot covered by a buffalo robe, four chairs, a spittoon, a common table with no drawers and a hook hanging at one end filled with papers, a water bucket and a tin cup on a bench, odds and ends of clothing and a sawed-off shotgun hanging on wooden pegs in the wall, and two repeating rifles over in a corner. Not a single place where a large key wouldn't be seen if a man had merely laid it down and made no attempt to hide it. Pinto resisted a natural impulse to dash about the room, shake everything that was loose, upset things, find that key! But common sense told him that this was no time for a wild and haphazard search. Keep cool!

Keep cool and think, that was the smart thing to do.

Paint returned from the cell door. The twins now stood face to face, each squarely on his two feet, tall, straight, deadly serious. They became conscious that the racket was easing down outside. A bad sign. Folks would be going back home. The mob would pick up where it left off. Damned little time left. Their steady eyes met and clung for an instant.

Said Paint quietly, "Calc'late we better open up."

Pinto nodded briefly, "Yep, befo' somebody gets to wonderin' what become of Buck. Take the cot. They may not see you over there. I'll hold down the table and play deppity."

HE SWUNG the door open. Keeping his back to it, he walked to the table and sat down as close to the wall as he could. Paint lounged on the cot with his long legs crossed, his head and shoulders against the wall as if he were about to fall asleep. Their thoughts raced frantically. Where in hell was Buck's key? Tomas stood at the cell door, holding onto the bars. His broad dark face showed no signs of fright, but his large black eyes burned eagerly above his high cheek bones. He kept utterly silent, staring through the front door.

Paint leaned forward and clasped a knee, then rocked back against the wall. His penknife and some silver money slid from his pants pocket onto the buffalo

robe. Pinto absent-mindedly watched him pick the things up. Suddenly the same thought struck each of them, jerked them to their feet.

Paint frowned down at the cot. "Buck was a-settin' here after he opened the cell."

Pinto lifted the edge of the heavy brown robe and shook it, glanced under the cot, pulled it away from the wall. A large key fell to the floor behind it!

"Senores!" called Tomas with a trace of excitement in his voice. "I can see past you through the door. Men look this way. One of them is the Leopard!"

Paint picked up the key and hurried back to the cell.

Pinto spun around. A single glance sent his hands speeding to his guns. Between the hotel and the river stood Canadian Bill and several other men, staring at the jail as if they had just caught sight of something suspicious but were still undecided about it. No doubt they had been looking at the fire and their eyes had not yet changed back to normal. Pinto gave them no time to gather their wits. He seized upon this chance to spring a surprise. Whipping out both six-shooters, he fired alternately right and left so rapidly as to produce a steady roar of gunfire and to create the illusion that several men were doing the shooting. He didn't try to hit anyone. He merely wanted to scatter them, send them to cover long enough for him and his companions to get out of there. The concussion from his first shot blew out the lamp. Now he could see better. Through the smoke from his guns he saw Wolf and his men clearly in the glare of the bonfire. Some dodged behind the hotel, others dived for the river bank; but there was one who did neither. He dropped to the ground, lay prone facing the jail and went to shooting. Canadian Bill Wolf was making a fight!

Things happened at split-second intervals. A bullet bit at the door jamb, flung splinters into Pinto's face. Another ripped through his clothing, gashed the skin under his left arm and spanged into the water bucket with a devil of a racket. He cursed. As yet reluctant to kill, he emptied his guns at a spot of bare ground that showed white in the reflection of the fire, almost under the marshal's nose.

"Eat dirt, damn you!" he growled as his hammers fell on empty cartridges.

Paint shoved him aside. "Git outa here you and Tomas. Keep low. I'll shoot over yo' heads. Git!"

Bent nearly double, Pinto darted out of the door with the stocky caporal at his heels. The blasts from Paint's guns almost sent them sprawling. Pinto took the north side of the jail this time. A few steps placed it between them and the men below the river bank, but those who had dodged behind the hotel now opened fire from its front door and windows. Guns also flashed at other points along the street until it seemed that half the town was throwing lead. Bullets splashed dust from the adobe wall beside him and Tomas, snarled through the weeds at their feet and split the air above and around them. They ran like fleeing shadows and soon vanished behind the jail, unhurt.

PAINT stopped shooting the instant Pinto and Tomas crossed the threshold, hoping to fool the gang into thinking that there was no one left inside. He knelt beside the door, gasping for breath in the dense cloud of gunsmoke that hung swirling in the still air. Suddenly firing from the street ceased, the guns in the hotel fell silent. His companions had either reached cover or gone down. During the space of five seconds Paint crouched there rigid, listening, his heart pounding in his throat, fearful that he might hear a moan or curse to tell him that his brother was hit. But he heard nothing. Sound in Borendo was dead—a dangerous silence. It meant that the town was watching and waiting for the fugitives to show themselves again. Paint gambled that they were guarding

the space behind the jail, that no guns were trained on its door.

He gathered his muscles, clenched his teeth, leaped outside. A man yelled. Others took it up. A rifle cracked sharply, a shotgun bellowed, six-shooters roared, and once more gunfire rolled through the night on the banks of the Rio Grande. However, most of this was wild shooting at nothing: men caught by surprise and cutting loose. In a twinkling Paint slipped around the south corner of the jail. This took him from under the guns on the street and all but a few of those at the hotel. Only the men on the river could get a clear shot at him now, and they were hampered by darkness and the reflection from the bonfire. It struck them in the faces, missed him completely. He reached the back of the building without a scratch.

Pinto and Tomas were waiting there.

"Come a-flyin'!" snapped Paint. "We got the whole damned town on our tails!"

They ran straight away from the jail until opposite the willows. The shooting continued, but they were covered by the old adobe and patches of brush practically all the way. Moreover, it was dark back there.

As they dived into the willows, Pinto exclaimed with boyish enthusiasm, "Here we are! But by dogies—for a minute back yander I'd a-swapped my chances for a dram of snakehead whiskey!"

"Me too," muttered Paint, breathing hard. "Jest listen to 'em. Bill's jail-house shore is a-ketchin' hell."

They mounted swiftly.

Pinto now realized that the scratch on his side was stinging some. He growled as they rode off, "And mind what I say—old Bill hisself has got a dose of misery comin' to him. He's the insultin'est lawman I ever swapped lead with."

Tomas, who understood a little English, clamped his stocky legs on the buckskin's barrel, and declared in Spanish, "Of a certainty, Senores, the Leopard is *not* a gentleman."

Chapter II

HE TOOK A LOT OF KILLING

"WE FOUGHT with knives, this Jose Ruiz and I," stated Tomas in Spanish, "and his throat was cut. What else would you expect, Senores?"

Paint snorted through his long nose. Pinto grunted. They had seen what Tomas could do with a knife.

Boyishly frank about it, the young Mexican went on to say, "Also the throat of his friend who fought with him and tried often to stab me in the back. But this one was a nobody. I have forgotten his name."

The three men were hunkered down in the shadow of a giant prickly pear, several miles up river from Borendo. Near by stood their ponies, dozing peacefully. Fifty feet away the Rio Grande sparkled in the moonlight as if happy to see them there, safe and sound, and cooking up more deviltry.

With a Mexican servant always in the house, Paint and Pinto had been brought up on Spanish and really spoke it more correctly than English, since it wasn't adapted to their Texas idiom, range slang and cow language. They therefore made it a practice to converse with Tomas in his native tongue inasmuch as he was a newcomer to the States and his English had not yet got its growth.

Inquired Paint, "What were you fighting about?"

Tomas lifted his expressive hands, palms outward. "A woman, naturally. When two Mexicans cut throats, Senores, some woman has sharpened their knives. Unless, of course, money is involved. Money is even more important than women, because when you have money you will certainly have women."

Having traveled pretty fast since they got their rascally Mexican friend out of jail, this was the twins' first chance to sit down and listen to his story. Now they wanted to hear it, knowing that it was bound to be good. Moreover, it would be

true. Tomas didn't lie to those who trusted him.

So Pinto asked, "You left the ranch a free man with a good saddle, good clothing and money in your pocket. Someone has mistreated you. Will you tell us about it?"

The husky vaquero flipped his cigarette away as if he hated the thing. Throwing his long arms out in a typical gesture, he burst into voluble Spanish, "Exactly, Senores! And look at me now. In the rags of a peon that scarcely cover my nakedness and no shoes on my feet. Mistreated, Senor? I have been ruined! Me—a Terreros, descendant of a count."*

Tomas paused, smiled. The effect was almost startling, two rows of very white teeth in a dark face beneath a fine black mustache.

He lifted his shoulders, and went on with childish simplicity, "Of course, Senores, I am no stranger to rags, having lived all my life as a peon until Don Jackson made me his caporal and you gentlemen made me your slave by your friendship."

"Thank you, Tomas," said Paint gravely. "Go ahead."

"My misfortunes began at a monte bank in Nueva Borendo," continued the caporal. "Curse that Mexican town; may many grave calamities overtake it!"

"So that is how it happened," mused Pinto. "The bank got your money, clothes, rigging and weapons." He added in English, "Might a-knowed it."

Tomas vigorously shook his head. Straight black hair tumbled down over his eyes and ears. He brushed it away, exclaiming, "Oh, no, Senores! I won. I won *five thousand dollars gold!*"

That set the twins back on their heels.

"Five — five thousand!" breathlessly stammered Paint. "And you call that a misfortune?"

"It proved to be," sadly declared Tomas. "Listen, Senores, and you will agree that it was. While returning from a visit to my father, my third stepmother and my twenty-four brothers and sisters, instead of crossing at once into Texas as I should have done, I tarried in Nueva Borendo to pay respects to one of my women. Afterward I saw this monte bank under a tree in the plaza. There was much gold on the table and behind it stood a dealer whom I have long known to be the greatest robber in all Mexico. Having a heart of ice and no soul he robs the rich—which is permissible—and the poor—for which his throat should be cut. This thief was alone with his gold, and I was alone with my knives; no one else was near. I showed him two of the five knives I carry on my person, described the other three, and assured him that for the first time in his evil life he would deal some honest monte. I explained that if I won I would suspect that he was being honest, but should I lose I would *know* that he was dealing dishonestly. He seemed to understand. And thus I won—won five thousand dollars before others came to play and I was forced to leave. I left somewhat hurriedly, fearing that he might have friends among the newcomers."

THE effect upon the twins was identical. The lower halves of their long freckled faces split wide open and for the next thirty seconds they laughed fit to kill. Mexican monte sharks were, as a class, the crookedest of all the crooked gamblers on the frontier and in their day these two wild young cowhands had lost plenty of money to them; therefore, to hear Tomas so innocently describe how he got the best of one of the sharpers was extremely gratifying as well as amusing.

The caporal sat cross-legged on the ground, wiggling his big toes, obviously as pleased as a boy whose antics have made his elders laugh.

When the twins calmed down a little,

* Tomas may have been right about his ancestry. In the middle 1700's an illiterate muleteer named Pedro Terreros conceived a way to drain the flooded and abandoned Real del Monte silver mine. He did the job, became fabulously wealthy, loaned the king of Spain a million dollars which was never repaid, was made Count of Regla, had many peons and many descendants.—C. C.

he went on, "And then, Senores, I proved to myself that I have a fine will-power. With the gold in my saddle-bags I resolutely turned my back on the women of Nueva Borendo, many of whom are beautiful, and crossed to the American side. Now, in this Texas Borendo I also have women. By this time my will-power was

growing tired, so I gave it a rest and went to pay respects to one of these women—the most beautiful and treacherous of all my women. I found her in the arms of another man. Therefore, he and I fought with knives. His friend came in to help him. Their throats were cut, this Jose Ruiz and his friend. Meanwhile, the woman ran screeching to the calaboose. The Leopard came with men and bad intentions toward me. I recrossed with some speed into Mexico."

The boys again shook with laughter. The broad-shouldered vaquero grinned happily, twirling the points of his big mustache.

Presently Pinto wiped his eyes, and inquired, "Did you still have the five thousand?"

"Most certainly, Senores!" exclaimed Tomas. "In my saddle-bags, safely hidden from the eyes of women. I had already made plans for this money, plans in which women had no part whatever; except, of course, incidentally from time to time."

"Do you care to say what you had planned to do with the money?" asked Paint.

The young Mexican's simple answer was almost childlike, "I would have given it to you, Senores, my friends who are teaching me how to be a good Texas American, and—"

The twins interrupted, momentarily forgetting their Spanish.

"What the hell?" exploded Paint.

"Huh?" grunted Pinto. "The whole five thousand to us?"

"Certainly," declared Tomas as if that was the only thing to do with money.

"Then I would have suggested that we go into Mexico and buy cheap cattle. Perhaps while there we might have found another monte dealer alone. If so, we could have bought more cheap cattle and soon we would have a fine rancho. You would be the rancheros and I the caporal. That is what I am, a leader of vaqueros and a good man with bad horses and wild cattle. But *you*, Senores, you should be rich rancheros."

Tomas paused, gazing dreamily at the river.

Paint and Pinto didn't care to say anything at the moment.

Pretty soon the caporal shrugged his shoulders, and continued, "But that Jose Ruiz! His cursed ghost clung to my stirrup. He had for a brother, the alcalde of Nueva Borendo! And that thieving monte dealer. How was an honest caporal like myself to know that it was not *his* money; that he merely works for this alcalde—Manuel Ruiz, and that this Ruiz has for a partner one Wolf, marshal of Borendo, the Leopard!"

Paint looked at Pinto, and vice versa.

"That was very bad," said Paint. "How did you learn all those things?"

"From one of my Nueva Borendo women, Senor," replied Tomas. "This Alicia is not, perhaps, the most beautiful of my women, but she is the very mother of treachery. Some day my Alicia will marry an unknown politician and elevate him to a governor's palace before she poisons him so as to get a younger man."

The twins were aching to have another good laugh, but they wanted to hear the

balance of this amazing story. They saw possibilities in the tie-up between Canadian Bill and the Mexican alcalde.

"We are interested, Tomas," stated Pinto. "Go on."

THE young Mexican's teeth again made a striking white line across his dark face. "With great pleasure, Senores. After evacuating Texas I rode straight to Alicia. It was late in the evening when I arrived, but I found a light in her house; also a strange man. My knife was out instantly—my longest one, and he had turned the color of an old drinking gourd by the time Alicia got between us. She threw herself upon me praying that I be patient and whispering sweet things in my ear, none of which I believed. But I am a patient man. I let him live, ordering her to send the scoundrel away. She did. He left in some haste. Then Alicia told me that he was Manuel Ruiz, alcalde of Nueva Borendo, half owner of the monte bank, partner of the Leopard! I immediately sent her flying to a cantina for a bottle of good wine because, Senores, I felt the need of it."

Gazing at his bare feet, Tomas lapsed into silence. He wiggled his big toes pensively for a moment, then continued, "I trust my Alicia when she is alone with me, but when I send her for a bottle of wine and she is gone long enough to drink it my suspicions are aroused. So I went quickly and took the gold from my saddlebags.

"In one corner of Alicia's house there is a little altar draped with a rich curtain of heavy silk and upon this altar stands a large crucifix which she no doubt stole from some church, or cajoled from the man who did steal it. With regret, Senores, I am commencing to believe that my Alicia's religion is no deeper than the perfumed rice powder with which she tries to mask her unlovely face. However, I was glad that she had the holy image. Its base was both high and wide and behind it I secreted my bag of gold. A clever hiding place, is it not true?"

The twins agreed that it was.

"After a while my Alicia returned with the wine and apologies for the delay," resumed Tomas. "But the apologies were insincere and the wine was treacherous. After one big drink I fell asleep."

He paused, then exclaimed dramatically, "And Senores, I awoke in the Nueva Borendo jail!"

The twins nodded sympathetically.

"A hell of a trick," growled Paint.

"A hell of a woman," declared Pinto.

They spoke English, but Tomas understood. "Thank you, Senores. I have been certain that you would feel that way about it, that you would hold me blameless."

"Innercent as a leetle calf," declared Paint.

"Couldn't noways do no wrong," stated Pinto.

The caporal got the gist of it, took them at their word. His dark face lit up with childlike pleasure. "A thousand thanks, my friends!" he cried. "It was morning in that bare cell. My clothing and my five knives were gone. In their place, these empty rags. I was sick. I cursed all women, most particularly the women of Nueva Borendo, and I took a vow never again to have an affair with a woman. Soon my head and stomach felt better and I realized that the vow was too severe for a man of my youth, so I modified it somewhat. In fact, the vow is made to apply to Alicia only."

Paint swallowed smoke and coughed mightily. Pinto thoughtlessly threw an unlighted cigarette away and went to rolling another.

"Within the hour," continued Tomas, "a policeman came to get me. He took me to the guardhouse. On the way I saw my beautiful Six W pony tied in the jail courtyard with some miserable Mexican beasts. His saddle and bridle were gone. His spirits were low. He looked prayerfully at me. My heart bled for him. In the

guardhouse I found the alcalde, this Manuel Ruiz, this woman-chaser. He talked big. I talked bigger. He threatened me with a pistol. I said, 'Give me my knives!' He pointed to them on a nearby table and promised that I might have them and my liberty if I would tell where the gold was hidden. I assured him that he was a fat vulture, a coward and a liar, and that I had placed the money on the altar of my faith. He misunderstood, of course, but that was not my fault. As you have learned, Senores, I lie no more than necessary."

THE young Mexican was so deadly serious, Paint and Pinto wouldn't think of laughing at him. They had, however, one devil of a job to keep from it.

"Thereafter we exchanged some unpleasant words," he went on to say, "and this Ruiz ordered me returned to the cell where rats might gnaw me until I 'gave up the gold. Five policemen kept me from his throat. Seven of them finally locked me up."

Said Pinto solemnly, "Seven is 'bout right, I'd say."

Tomas studied his face doubtfully for a moment, then continued, "Now, in Nueva Borendo I have a woman who is ugly, stupid and honest. Maria is her name and she is a priceless jewel. Also, one of those seven policemen was a man whom I had met under more cheerful circumstances. Juan is his name and I will live to cut his throat! During the struggle I managed so that this Juan and I were on the ground with the other six on top of us. While pretending to chew his ear off, I whispered, 'Bring me Maria Perez. She has money'."

He drew his knees up and wrapped his long arms about them. "Senores, that word 'money' is a magic word. My Maria came at night while Juan was on guard. She brought money. We made arrangements. He received a little gold, Maria a big kiss, and I my liberty and my pony. But I had no time to recover clothing, saddle, knives or gold, for this Juan lost his nerve or tried treachery—perhaps both. While I was untying Coyote, this cursed policeman sounded the alarm. But fortunately the courtyard gate was open. Coyote and I left there in great haste. Outside we ran over a squad of soldiers on horses who were resting in Nueva Borendo while chasing some Indians whom they did not want to catch. They pursued us. We flew to the river and crossed into Texas. On the north bank we met the marshal of Borendo. He took me to jail."

"Of course you fought him," remarked Paint.

Tomas slowly shook his head. "No, Senor. Mexicans and Indians I fight for pleasure and excitement—Americans only when I cannot outrun them, or to save my life."

The twins understood and appreciated what was behind this statement. In his native land Tomas had been little better than a slave all his life, with the result that Texas and the treatment he had received from Texans was like heaven to him.

"Did Wolf say anything to you about the money?" inquired Pinto.

"He did, Senor. Confidentially he told me that he would allow me to escape if I took him to where it was hidden."

"Huh!" grunted Paint. "What did you say to that?"

Tomas smiled mischievously, "Most politely I told the Leopard that I had heard such escapes were dangerous, often fatal. Day after day he talked to me, sometimes cursing and threatening, and yesterday he said that a mob was going to hang me for cutting the throat of that Ruiz. Unless, of course, I led him to the money. Again I courteously refused."

"Took guts to do that," muttered Pinto in English.

The caporal may have understood, for he said, "Oh, I was afraid, Senores, but I knew that you would come. I had already

seen Carlos. He came here looking for me the day after I was confined and we talked through the window that night. I knew he would get back to the ranch and that you would rescue me."

His simple faith in his American friends was typical of many Mexican ranch hands who served their Texan employers with a blind loyalty unexcelled by any other race and like children, trustfully depended upon them when in trouble.

Paint asked, "What are your plans now, Tomas?"

The caporal lifted his broad shoulders carelessly. "Your plans are my plans, Senores, but I would like to get a little money so as to repay my Maria."

The twins stood up, yawned and stretched.

"Reckon it's 'bout time we was a-fordin' the old Rio," observed Paint.

"Shore is," agreed Pinto. "Must be all of nine mile down to that there Mexican town with the woman-chasin' alcalde."

Tomas seemed to bounce straight from the ground to the bare back of his buckskin. He caught the little pony by surprise and for thirty seconds it did everything but turn its hide inside out in frantic efforts to unload him. The buckskin might just as well have undertaken to shed the black stripe that marked the course of its backbone.

NUEVA BORENDO had not gone to bed when the three men came in sight of the place. In common with other Mexican border towns of the 70's, it kept pace with its Texas neighbor across the river—and most of them had one—in the matter of late hours, saloons, gambling dens and brothels. Some even went the American town a few better, and Nueva Borendo was one of these.

The riders halted at a point where the goat and burro trail over which Tomas was guiding them tilted down the precipitous face of a bluff west of town. The young caporal showed his impatience to go on, but politely said nothing about it. The twins, however, were in no particular hurry. Paint stepped off and went to adjusting his saddle blanket and girths. Pinto hooked a leg over the horn of his saddle and stared thoughtfully down at the cluster of adobes. Lights winked back at him craftily as if they knew something he didn't know, and from overhead the round old moon smiled down upon everything as though it had paused there in its race across the sky, hoping to see some fun.

"D'you know somethin'?" asked Pinto.

Bacon had just taken a playful nip at Paint and he was quarreling with the pony about it. He snapped at his brother, "I don't know much, but I'm a heap better off than you are. What is it?"

Pinto let the insult pass. "I betcha we run onto Canadian Bill down yander."

"Sartinly!" growled Paint, still fussing at the pony. "I done figgered that out a long time back. He—"

Pinto horned in, "Naturally he calc'lates we'll never go off and leave five thousand dollars in Mexico, so instead of gettin' saddle-sores a-chasin' us, he simply—"

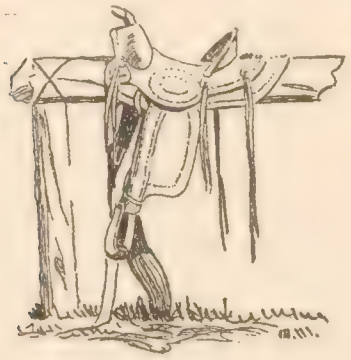
Paint cut him off, "—comes over here with a passel of hand-picked scalawags and gets half tight while he's a-waitin' for us to mosey into his trap like the damned fools he knows we are. That's—"

Bacon took another little nip. Paint changed the subject. "Hey! You apron-faced, grass-bellied, tick-ridden son of a Mexican goat, I'll—"

"You won't do a durned thing to that there pony!" growled Pinto. "He can see that you ain't a-wearin' no leggin's and yo' britches is so daggoned tight you cain't blame him none. Make 'aste. We don't want to keep old Bill up too late."

Paint climbed back into the saddle, cussing the pony and his brother impartially. They set off down the trail after Tomas, each thinking substantially the same thoughts about the job ahead of them. It was a fool play any way they looked at it. When they got Tomas out of jail they

should have hit straight back to the ranch. To the devil with his clothes and rigging and five thousand dollars! The Old Man would buy him all the stuff he needed and what good would the money ever do that



crazy Mex? Naturally, *they* wouldn't think of taking any part of it. Tough going ahead, plenty tough, and they'd ought to be burnin' the breeze for home.

Notwithstanding the escapades these wild young cowhands were forever getting into, they had sound judgment and those were the sober, sensible thoughts it suggested. Opposed to these, however, was the code of their breed by which their lives were ordered, a rule of conduct that had been drilled into them from infancy—*back a friend to the limit, right or wrong.* A dangerous code, that, since it occasionally made outlaws of men who otherwise might never have ridden a crooked trail; but it was a product of the troublesome times in which they lived, when neighbors had to be neighbors, when a man appreciated a favor and never forgot it, when men worked and fought together for the common good.

Neither the racial distinction between them and the caporal—Tomas was a *mestizo,* a mixture of Indian and *creole,* white—nor his social standing as a Mexican vaquero made a particle of difference to Paint and Pinto Hawkins. He had worked with them, fought with and for them, so he was their friend. Tomas had been wronged, or thought he had, which was the same as far as they were concerned. They would, therefore, help him to right that wrong, knowing that he'd do as much for them. Nor did the twins endure any shooting pains in their consciences with regard to ownership of the money. If Tomas did in fact take it from the monte sharp by force of arms, he was merely robbing a robber and the five thousand now belonged to him.

As they walked their horses into the western edge of town, Tomas suddenly halted. His long arm shot out and he pointed.

"Look, Senores!" he exclaimed cautiously. "That light over there by itself is the house of my—of Alicia. She has company tonight, the wench! That Ruiz, that alcalde no doubt. Alicia helps him with his dishonest scheming. She will make him a governor and herself a lady if I do not cut his throat while he is still a thieving alcalde and she a—no lady."

The twins swung their horses aside into the shadow of a flourishing huisache tree. Neither spoke for several moments. Each looked hard at the woman's house, then their eyes met.

Said Paint, "If the old alcalde is smart, he's done baited his trap with that there gal's wigwam."

Pinto nodded. "He shore has, figgerin' that Tomas will come back to get square with her."

"We better go see, I reckon."

"That's jest what I was fixin' to say."

WHEN Tomas found out what the boys planned to do, they nearly had to tie him. He wanted to charge the place barehanded. Paint gave him his bowie knife and told him to calm down if he didn't want to get beefed by a six-shooter.

There were no houses within a hundred yards of Alicia's. Between it and the tree under which the three men were standing, there ran a deep sag floored by high weeds and clumps of shrubbery, tamarack and other dense growths. This draw came down from the north, passed thirty feet

west of the woman's house and circled south of it into the town. Apparently there were no other places near Alicia's home where a man might hide his horse. The twins realized that it would be rank folly for them to get far from their ponies in this hostile community, so they rode north for a ways, turned into the sag and came slowly back to within fifty yards of Alicia's where they found some shrubbery that completely hid the horses. There they dismounted and took off their spurs, adjusted their belts and holsters, tested the action of their guns—precautions which the impatient Tomas evidently thought to be a waste of good time, although he didn't say so. Afterward the three men slipped down the draw to a point opposite the house.

Crouching in tall weeds and grass, the twins examined the place and its surroundings with the eyes of hunters trained from boyhood by an Indian-fighting father. Every possible hiding place, every shadow, they studied with the patience of redmen. At length they were satisfied that if an ambush was waiting for them it simply had to be inside the house. There wasn't a soul in the yard, front or back.

Now they turned their attention to the house itself, an adobe with a shed-roofed stockade kitchen attached. Putting their heads together with Tomas, the twins learned that the adobe comprised two fairly large rooms—parlor in front, bedroom between it and the kitchen. Everything was open, the kitchen door, two windows on the west side and the front door. Curtains or drapes of red cloth covered the windows and apparently the door was similarly guarded, for it threw a shaft of pink light onto the bare ground beneath the porch roof. The kitchen was unlighted, its door a gaping black hole in a wall which the moon painted a flat white. The boys gazed speculatively at that door. If this were a trap, there was its mouth. With the front of the house lit up, an intruder might be expected to chose the back door.

Evidently Tomas had the same thought, for he whispered eagerly, "Senores, let me go before you and clear the kitchen if there are men in it. When you hear a struggle you will know that I am cutting throats, then you attack the front and catch everybody by surprise. Is that not good?"

"None too good," drawled Pinto. "We all go to once. You fellas take the front door, I'll take the kitchen."

"You'd oughta give me the kitchen," stated Paint, "but we ain't got no time to argy, so it's yo'r'n."

His long fingers bit into the caporal's muscular arm. "Now, jest you listen to me, you ramblin' throat-slitter! This here job ain't serious enough to call for killin's unless we meet up with Canadian Bill. We aim to get back yo' money and stuff in spite of hell and bad Mexicans, but we ain't a-sidin' you none when you go to carvin' up folks jest to get square with 'em. Savvy?"

Under the stress of the moment, Paint forgot to speak Spanish. Pinto translated his remarks for Tomas' benefit, adding some emphasis of his own. Without a sign of reluctance, the caporal courteously assured them that he bowed to their wishes in all things, now and hereafter.

"All right, let's go!" growled Paint.

THE three men came up from the draw and dashed at the house like charging panthers. The twins bent low and ran a zig-zag course. Tomas ran straight, erect, head thrown back, his knife flashing in the moonlight and his bare feet flying to keep pace with Paint's long legs.

Gambling on a surprise if anyone were expecting him to sneak in cautiously, Pinto plunged through the kitchen door as if it wasn't there. A gun roared! The concussion in that small space almost knocked him down, but the bullet merely whipped his hat away. The speed with which he dived into the room may have saved his life. He spun around. Through the swirling smoke he saw a man scrambling

up from behind the door, confused, befuddled, as though he had been dozing there and fired while half asleep. Pinto sprang at him. Again he shot wildly, for the tall cowhand must have materialized in his dazed senses like a long lean ghost darting through the dim light. The bullet ripped at Pinto's vest, the flame set it afire, the explosion staggered him. He lashed viciously down at his antagonist's gun-hand with the barrel of his six-shooter. He felt a bone crunch, heard a gun thud on the dirt floor. A split second later he launched another lightning blow, an upward jab at close quarters with the muzzle of his Colt. Driven by a powerful arm and shoulder trained to time an uppercut, the gun was a frightful weapon. Its muzzle buried in the soft flesh beneath the big Mexican's chin. He gasped, dropped in a heap on the floor as if suddenly paralyzed in all his limbs.

Behind Pinto the bedroom door was flung open so violently as to crash against the wall. He whirled in the nick of time. There stood a wiry man, a knife in his left hand, his right clutching at a holstered gun while he peered uncertainly through the dense smoke into the dark kitchen.

Pinto covered him instantly. "H'ist 'em!"

The Mexican understood. He dropped his knife. His hands went up.

Meanwhile, Paint and Tomas reached the front door a fractional second after Pinto got to the kitchen. The blast of the first shot in there sent Paint's heart to his throat—fear for his brother, and it made a wild man out of the young caporal. He sprang in front of Paint. Instead of pushing the curtain aside, he slashed it from top to bottom with one lightning sweep of his knife. He plunged through into the room. The tall cowhand had a cooler head. He drew both guns, darted a glance at the corners upon either side of him as he stepped across the threshold. But his caution was wasted. There were only two persons in the room, a man and a woman. The man was sprawled back in a rocking chair as if he had just fallen that way, his stumpy legs spread wide, his pudgy hands gripping the arms, his fat body quivering in terror; for Tomas stood over him, left hand buried in his thick coarse hair forcing his head back, pricking his flabby throat with the point of the bowie knife. As for the woman—a stout-hipped and full-breasted person with a rather heavy face made striking by large, beautiful and intelligent eyes—she sat with hands folded in her lap, placidly rocking backward and forth on the hard clay floor.

The second shot in the kitchen shook the place at the moment Paint came in. He ran straight through to the bedroom, but things were happening mighty fast in there. Pinto was holding up the Mexican by the time he arrived.

"Fetch him in here!" he barked.

Paint turned back into the front room, followed by Pinto and his prisoner. Tomas still had his man by the hair, talking a mile a minute to him and Alicia. He never gave the man a chance to say anything and the woman appeared content to listen and go on rocking.

The caporal glanced up at Paint, past him at Pinto and the disarmed captive. "So happy to learn that you are safe, Senor!" he exclaimed. "Shoot that man or let me cut his throat when I have finished with this one. He is a very bad bandit. Ramon Garcia is his name and he steals and murders in both Texas and Mexico. He pays much money to the Leopard and the alcalde of Nueva Borendo, and they hide him when Rangers or Mexican soldiers come searching for him. I know the pelado. A long time ago I bought a Texas horse from him. It was no good!"

"I hang my bandits," answered Pinto. "What have you got there?"

Tomas looked down at his own prisoner, and growled dangerously, "This is that Manuel Ruiz, the thieving alcalde who robbed and imprisoned me."

He again glanced at the twins. "Shall I slit his throat up and down or from side to side, Senores? Personally, I prefer the latter."

Paint went and stood over the pair. The tall cowhand folded his arms and gazed thoughtfully at the blotched face of the alcalde, who was too scared to talk.

"I think that *is* best for a throat as fat as his," said Paint gravely, "but first you should make him tell you where to find your clothing and other things."

The woman Alicia rocked calmly back and forth, watching the performance with no more concern than if it were being staged for her entertainment. However, following Paint's remark she broke her silence, speaking in a voice beautifully soft and throaty, almost magnetic.

"My Manuel," she purred, "if they intend to kill you anyhow, you should not tell them one little thing. A confession under such circumstances will not improve your chances hereafter."

Tomas glared at her. "Silence, woman!"

He shook the alcalde's head roughly, pricked his neck where a vein stood out like a hard-twist rope. "Now, listen to *me*, my Manuel! There are many ways to kill a man and I know them all. Some are painless, even pleasant. Others are—Mother of God!—they are slow and painful!

"Tell me—where is the beautiful saddle and the excellent bridle for which my capitan, Don Jackson, paid two hundred dollars?"

He took the knife away and eased up on the alcalde's hair so that he could lift his head enough to speak.

"At the jail!" gasped Ruiz. "They were confiscated and sold, but the buyer has not yet taken them away."

Tomas forced the alcalde's head back again and stropped the blade on his greasy jowl. Afterward he drew an imaginary line on the fat man's neck with the back of the knife. Ruiz flinched and trembled all over. The caporal looked at the twins with the air of a surgeon conducting a clinic.

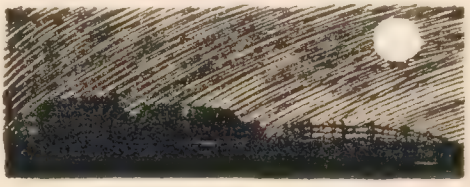
He said professionally, "This man's life is guarded by fat, hog fat. On such a throat, Senores, one must cut deeply."

The twins nodded solemnly.

TOMAS then scowled down at the alcalde's panic-stricken face. "And where are my fine clothes, my *chaparejos*, my sombrero, my boots, my spurs, my gorgeous red sash, total value no less than four hundred dollars? And my five beautiful knives that I have treasured for many years, each a priceless blade of the finest steel tempered in the blood of dogs like you. Where are they? Answer me!"

Ruiz obviously tried not to look at Alicia. Her large, fiery eyes were filled with scorn. He choked out, "At the jail, Don Terreros! All confiscated and sold but still in the room behind my office. I swear it! Here are my keys. There are no prisoners and only one man on guard at the jail tonight. He is a coward. He will run. Go and get your belongings, Don Terreros. Go now!"

Paint took the keys which the fat man had frantically dug from his pocket. Tomas released the alcalde and turned his attention to the woman. He stopped a yard in front of her, both hands on his hips, the knife still gripped in his right.



He scowled ferociously down at her. "You, Alicia Dominguez," he snarled, "are a traitoress!"

She smiled fearlessly up at him, a really attractive smile, and the light in her eyes would have melted most anything.

"But, my Tomas," she murmured, "five thousand dollars is a fortune to a poor woman like myself."

The broad caporal flexed his knees and

spread his bare feet a little wider. "So! And you were to get part of it."

Alicia's rocker slowed down, but didn't stop. "Yes, Tomas my love, I will not lie to you."

"Huurumph!" said Tomas. He shifted his weight to one leg, flipped the knife so that it spun upward and adroitly caught it by the handle when it came down. "So you turned traitoress for money and not for the love of another man. Mmmmm-huh! That is only human. It is excusable. In fact, you are *not* a traitoress, my Alicia!"

Pinto simply *had* to laugh. He nodded to Paint to keep an eye on Garcia and went back to the kitchen to tie the other Mexican. Paint was no better off than his brother, but somehow he managed to keep quiet.

The woman rocked a little faster for a moment. A gleam of triumph flashed in her eyes, then quickly disappeared. She asked softly, "And what of the gold, Tomas my lover?"

The young rascal somehow contrived to look as if she had reminded him of something he'd forgotten. "The gold? Why, of course, the gold. Alicia, my sweetheart, you have it!"

The rocker stopped dead still. Her hands with their many rings came to rest on its arms. She lifted her coal-black eyebrows and put her smile to work. "Now you are joking, my Tomas. But I love you because you *are* such a deceiving devil."

Tomas bowed from the waist as gallantly as his rags and bare feet would permit. "If I prove that you have the gold, may I keep it all?"

Alicia gestured disdainfully, but nevertheless with grace. "Certainly!"

He turned on the alcalde who had, by now, commenced to breathe normally. "And you, Ruiz? If I prove that Alicia has the money, do you relinquish all claim to it?"

The fat man hesitated.

Tomas revolved the knife in his hand so that the lamplight glanced from its blade.

Ruiz swallowed two or three times, and burst out, "Of course, Don Terreros! If this woman has deceived me, I will—"

"What?" inquired the caporal, looking at the knife.

"Nothing!"

The stocky caporal swaggered with brave assurance to the altar in the corner. Alicia gasped audibly. Manuel Ruiz wheezed in his fat throat. Tomas pushed the curtain aside, reached behind the crucifix, brought out a buckskin bag!

The instant she caught sight of it and while his back was still turned, Alicia sprang from her chair with astonishing agility for one who looked to be so inactive. Her hand darted down to the hem of her skirt. Paint got a glimpse of knees clothed in red silk stockings, then the flash of a dagger!

He caught her arm without a split second to spare.

ALICIA didn't struggle. She had too much sense to do that. Instead, she leaned toward him, smiled up at him. "Thank you, Senor!" she breathed. "A thousand thanks for preventing me from doing a foolish thing. I am ashamed of my temper. But that man Tomas *is* annoying at times." She rolled an eye at Tomas.

The young caporal threw back his head and laughed as loud as he ever laughed. He gestured at Alicia with the bag of money, exclaiming to Paint, "Look at her, Senor! My Alicia! A woman with fire in her veins. I like that!"

Pinto showed up at the bedroom door. "Huh!" he snorted. "Hell's fire, I betcha."

Paint released the woman. "We must hurry," he told Tomas. "You guard the prisoners here. We will take your horse and go to the jail for your things. Watch these people carefully, your Alicia most closely of all!"

She sank into the rocker. Tilting her

glistening black head at a becoming angle, she glanced up at the tall cowhand through long curving lashes that she knew how to manipulate. "Thank you, Senor. I believe you and I could be *very good* friends. Is it not true?"

"Cain't—er—cain't never tell," drawled Paint.

The freckled twin was so flustered he nearly dropped the money bag when Tomas handed it to him, and he tripped over his own feet on the way to the door with Pinto snickering behind him.

En route to Nueva Borendo, Tomas had given the twins the general layout of the town so that they now knew where to go. Keeping to back streets and riding slowly, they approached the central plaza on the side upon which the jail was situated. It occupied a corner—a rectangular affair designed as a fort, an eight-foot adobe wall enclosing barrack rooms, stables, a cell, a storeroom and the commandante's office which the alcalde now used, there being no soldiers stationed here. There were two gates in the wall, one on the side street and another on the plaza. The boys first went to the side gate. It was locked.

"Damn the luck!" muttered Paint as he swung back into his saddle. "Now we gotta show ourselves on the square."

While his brother was trying the gate, Pinto had been looking down the street and across the plaza at the lighted saloons and gambling houses which were visible from where he sat. Every door and window was open. On the far side of the square almost directly opposite the jail he saw what he had more than half expected to see, a pair of leopard-skin legs and a two-hundred-dollar sombrero walking into the light from the Cantina Azteca!

"Looky over yander," he said quietly.

Paint looked. "Uh-huh, jest what we figgered on."

"So I reckon we better work fast."

"Damned fast!"

The boys remained where they were, however, until they had seen Canadian Bill, Buck and two other armed men go into the saloon and line up at the bar.

TOMAS had assured them that the main entrance to the jail yard was always left open, so they rode boldly around the corner and down the street toward the gate a hundred feet distant. And that, Paint told himself, was one of the longest rides he had ever made. Aside from its ramshackle bandstand, the plaza was bare ground with nothing to hide them from anyone who happened to be looking their way; and that old moon—he had been late in coming tonight, but he sure went to work when he got there. He forced them to ride over a white street and he made a white background of the adobe wall on their right. They watched their shadows bob along that wall and couldn't help thinking what fine targets they'd make. When at length they reached the gate, found it open and rode inside, Pinto was dying to let out a yell just to ease his feelings.

A barefooted man with a serape around his shoulders, came from somewhere out of the shadows trailing a carbine and walking as if they had disturbed his rest. He accosted them sleepily. Paint carelessly replied that the alcalde had given them his keys and sent them to get the belongings of one Tomas Terreros who had lately been a prisoner there. The policeman behaved as if he thought this to be entirely proper, if he thought at all, and waved them to the office door. Paint found the right key and unlocked it. Pinto politely asked the guard if he would sit near the door and hold their horses, which he readily agreed to do—no doubt because the task required sitting. The twins wanted the fellow where they could keep an eye on him. Paint watched him sharply while Pinto lit the office lamp, thinking that the alcalde or Canadian Bill might have told him to be on the lookout for them; but he sat with chin on his knees, back to the wall, holding their horses' reins. They had finished saddling the buckskin, Paint

was tying some of the caporal's things on it and Pinto had returned to the office for the balance of them when something appeared suddenly to click in the policeman's brain. He stole a glance at Paint, looked furtively around the side of the door at Pinto. Paint snapped a sharp command at him. He sprang up and went flying away like a scared rabbit.

The young cowhand drew a gun, then just stood there for a second and watched the Mexican go racing into the plaza. He didn't have the heart to shoot him, even to cripple him down.

"Pore cuss!" he thought. "Probably got sixteen hongry chillun."

He cautiously called out to Pinto, "Come a-runnin' fella!"

Pinto came quickly, both hands and arms filled with the caporal's belongings. Before he reached the door a word from Paint told him what had happened. He speeded up, leaped from the office into the yard. Unnoticed by either of the boys, the policeman's carbine was lying just outside where he left it when he ran off. Pinto's high heel landed on it. His ankle turned, he measured his length on the hard ground. Going down with hands and arms loaded, he didn't throw them out to break the shock.

The fall momentarily stunned him and it completely knocked the breath out of him. He rolled onto his back and lay still, gasping. Learning that his brother wasn't badly hurt, Paint scurried around picking up things and tying them on the buckskin. Precious seconds were lost. He took time to glance through the gate. The policeman was waving his arms and talking to a couple of men on the west side of the plaza. They pointed toward the Azteca. He ran that way!

The tall cowhand hurried back to his brother, helped him to his feet. In a few moments Pinto shook himself, took a deep breath and said he was ready to go. Again Paint went and looked through the gate. A quick oath burst from him. Four men were running across the plaza toward the jail, led by Canadian Bill Wolf!

"Too damned late!" he growled. "We got a fight on our hands."

Although the twins had previously made up their minds to drive Wolf out of Borendo, purely from gratitude to Rio Grande Joe Loftus and for no other serious reason, they never had any intention to kill the man. They had hoped to make a fool of him somehow, show him up, ridicule him before his fickle followers and thus break his control of the town. Now the situation had changed—one of those lightning moves with which Fate springs surprises on men, diverts the course of their lives, alters their destiny. Here was a gunfight in a day when gunfights were deadly affairs, when men shot to kill and themselves expected to die. And Paint and Pinto Hawkins didn't like it a damned bit!

They ran to the wall and took a stand near the gate. A few moments later they heard the swish of leather, jangling spurs and the shuffle of running feet—men in boots running on their toes. The twins were older now. Approaching death—either for themselves or other men—had straightened and hardened their lips, hollowed their cheeks, kindled a dangerous fire in their eyes. Each calmly drew a gun. Their glances met for an instant. Two words were spoken.

"Wolf," said Paint.

"Buck," said Pinto.

The marshal was first to reach the gate, Buck and the others a pace behind him. Either they had drunk enough to undermine their caution or Wolf was recklessly determined to redeem himself for the loss of a prisoner, for they were a good six feet inside before coming to a halt.

"Stick 'em up!" commanded Paint from the shadow of the wall on their right.

Suddenly the group in the moonlit courtyard was shrouded in smoke through which darted rapiers of flame and invisible death, and there followed one of those insane moments when a man's reflexes

seize control of him and his thoughts cease to function; when he may die on his feet, emptying his guns at the man who killed him.

Although the odds were two to one against the twins, they had their guns out and the element of surprise gave them a big advantage. Buck drew swiftly enough, but he was heavy and slow to turn. Pinto drove a bullet through his thighs. The shock of it knocked him down, put him out of the fight. The third man fell victim to a freak injury. Standing close to Pinto, almost in line with Buck, he spun around in a crouch at the instant the cowhand fired. Flame licked at his face. He dropped his gun and staggered back, covered his eyes with one hand and lifted his other. The fourth man—the one in the rear—was looking the other way when Paint barked his command. He sprang toward the gate, then turned and whipped out a gun. His retreat before getting into the fight gave Pinto the fractional part of a second he needed to jerk his Colt out of its recoil and throw down on the fellow. At the same instant the tall cowhand twisted his lithe body aside in a confusing movement that may have saved his life. A bullet glanced from his heavy cartridge belt with a jolt that made him think he was hit. Then Pinto placed his shot. His slug caught the man at the gate in the shoulder, spun him around, flung him face-downward into the street. Temporarily paralyzed, perhaps, he made no effort to rise.

Canadian Bill Wolf had the highly trained, hair-trigger reactions of a professional gunman. Paint's sharp demand set them off. The marshal whirled like the leopard whose skin he wore. He drew and fired in the same motion—fast, amazingly fast—but the advantage was all with the man who challenged him. Paint was ready, coldly waiting. Something, perhaps an instinct for fair play, held his thumb on the hammer until Wolf's gun belched smoke into his very teeth and its slug plucked at his sleeve. Then Paint fired. He fired shot after shot with extreme rapidity, yet with a certain workmanlike deliberation that was appalling to watch and deadly in effect. His first bullet hurled the marshal back onto his heels, the second spun him half around. But he didn't go down, refused to go down, held on his feet by a savage instinct to destroy an enemy. He fired wildly like a blind man, emptied one gun, tried vainly to throw it at the lean and somber face of the man who was shooting him to pieces. Then he groped for his second Colt. His fingers failed to find it. He coughed. Dark lines spread grotesquely downward from his mouth over his smooth chin.

"Damn—you!" he choked out as he sank in a heap.

No doubt Canadian Bill Wolf had swaggered through life a conceited show-off, a domineering bully and a boaster, but, when it came his time to die he took a lot of killing.

NUEVA BORENDO took cover when the Americans went to fighting. The twins galloped unmolested back to Alicia's house, sat their ponies down in her yard. Tomas came flying through the door, leaped into his saddle with a joyous yell. The three men sped off in the moonlight toward the Rio Grande.

On the way Pinto asked, "Did you have any trouble, Tomas?"

"It was nothing," answered the caporal. "That Ramon Garcia, that bandit, he had a knife hidden on his person, but, Senores, my devoted Alicia, she warned me in time!"

An hour later old Rio Grande Joe Loftus stood at his wagon yard gate and watched Paint, Pinto and Tomas jog away on the San Antonio trail.

He shook his white head, and solemnly told a freighter's mule who was dozing in the corral near at hand, "What I mean—everybody better ketch a-holt and hang on when them damned twins is insulted!"

The West was Won by the Pioneer.

JUDGE PLEASANTS BRINGS THE LAW TO DEWITT COUNTY

By

WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE

A COMBINATION of factors made Texas in the seventies the most lawless spot on earth. West Texas was frontier country, and the Apaches and Comanches were raiding it ruthlessly. The Civil War had unsettled the lives of men and Reconstruction days were building up a bitterness that found expression in outrages hard to understand now. Outlaws from all over the South and border states poured into Texas. Some infested the towns and others skulked in the brush from which they rode out on nefarious night errands. Gunmen were employed by ranchers to protect and increase their herds. Life was cheap, and one held his own or took what belonged to another by stealth or strength.

There were a dozen family feuds raging, the start of most of which had been quarrels over cattle. Notable among these were the Horrell-Higgins and the Taylor-Sutton vendettas. In judging the participants one should consider the times and the circumstances. A false sense of honor, family pride and loyalty, the call to clan unity, were as much involved as passion, revenge and hatred. It was a wild country.

The Suttons and Taylors were the most important cattle owners in DeWitt County. Their stock ran in part the same range. A difference of opinion concerning ownership led to trouble. Both the Taylors and the Suttons were large families and they had intermarried with a good many families in the neighborhood equally numerous. In the course of time all these relations became drawn into the trouble that developed. Before order was at last restored conditions were such that neutrals, looked on with suspicion by both factions, were almost forced to take sides. DeWitt became a county divided against itself. Men went about their daily work carrying weapons. Armed bands roamed the county.

Two young men rode in to Clinton, DeWitt County, to a dance held in the courtroom of Judge Henry Clay Pleasants. They were Buck Taylor and Dick Chisholm. While they were hitching their horses shots rang out. Both of them lay in the dust. They had ridden to their last dance. John Wesley Hardin, the worst killer in Texas history and an ally of the Taylors, rubbed out Jack Helms in an impromptu pistol duel.

Scrap Taylor and two of his companions were arrested for rustling and taken by the sheriff to Clinton. Before morning all three of them had been hanged. A mob had stormed the jail. So the factional

struggle went on from bad to worse. Both sides rallied for a battle to decide the issue. They came together at Clinton. The Suttons were deployed in and about the courthouse and the Taylors moved up from the river to attack. Stores had been hurriedly closed and women and children herded into houses.

Into the open space between the two forces walked a man, in his hands a shotgun. The man was Judge Pleasants, the hero of the Taylor-Sutton feud. He stood there, facing first one party and then the other, and delivered a one-man ultimatum.

"There will be no fighting here," he announced in a clear ringing voice. "I mean to see that peace comes to this county. Go home, and stop this mad business."

Both sides were taken by surprise. Judge Pleasants was a man of character and of influence. He had been trying to rally the citizens of the county to neutrality, and its officers to enforce the law against the feudists. He was looked on with suspicion by the firebrands of both sides, but these wild fighting men knew bravery when they saw it. After all he was the law, and the leaders did not want to put themselves in the wrong. While they hesitated, a few of the leading women of the town walked across the courthouse square and joined the judge. That ended the battle of Clinton before it started. The clans slipped out of town by different roads.

In spite of the efforts of Judge Pleasants the feud ran on for years—until long after no Taylor or Sutton was left to lead the gunmen. Scores were assassinated. There were spies in both camps, and every unguarded word was dangerous. No man, however innocent of offense he might be, felt safe from an unexpected bullet.

Judge Pleasants had tried to end the long years of terror by appeals to good citizens and local peace officers. He knew now that way could not succeed. Witnesses were afraid to testify. A number of them had been murdered to prevent their appearance in court. He wrote to the governor and asked that a company of Texas Rangers be sent to DeWitt County.

Lieutenant Lee Hall, an intrepid and dashing officer, was in charge of the detachment. He consulted with Judge Pleasants. They gathered what evidence they could against the men accused in the particularly brutal murder of a neutral noncombatant, Dr. Philip Brazell. It was agreed that Hall should arrest the guilty ones and the judge should see that justice was done in the courts. A grand jury was called and indictments found against seven men.

One of them was Joe Sitterlie. He was about to be married, and a dance was given at the home of the bride to celebrate the event. Hall decided to be an uninvited guest, and he took with him twenty-five fighting men armed with Winchesters and revolvers. It was a bitterly cold night. When the Rangers arrived the young couple had been married and the dance was in full swing. Hall surrounded the house and moved forward alone to the porch.

He was met by William Meador, one of the seven wanted for the Brazell killings. Meador was marshal of Cuero and Sitterlie was a deputy sheriff.

Hall pushed past him into the house. At sight of him there was a tumult of shouts and threats. He waited till it had died down.

"My boys surround the house," he said. "I want the following men." And he read a list of six men.

"By God, no!" a voice cried. "We'll fight it out."

"Suits us," Hall cried. "We'll get the women and children out of here and go to it." The angry dancers had pushed him back toward the door. He cried to his men, "They're moving out the women and kids. It's to be a fight, boys. Get ready to blaze away when I give the word."

"We don't want to kill you all," Meador cried.

"You won't," Hall answered; then, abruptly, "Give me that gun," he ordered.

The sharp implacable challenge, backed by the Ranger's cold steady gaze, was too much for the marshal. He passed over his revolver. Hall called in two of his men to collect the weapons. All of the wedding guests were disarmed.

The bride made a personal plea to the lieutenant. "This is my wedding night, and I'll only be married once. Let the dance go on, please."

Hall agreed. Some of the troopers did the squares with pretty partners while the others patrolled outside. When morning came the Rangers took their prisoners to Clinton, but not until Hall had warned those he left behind that if any attempt to rescue the prisoners was made his men had orders to kill them first.

The prisoners were arraigned before Judge Pleasants. Some of the best lawyers in Texas were brought in by the prisoners to argue that bail should be allowed. The Sutton forces were confident that the judge would free the men pending trial. Many threats were made that if Pleasants remanded them to jail he would not live a week. The *habeas corpus* hearings took several days. Both the Taylor and the Sutton factions attended the proceedings in force.

The morning came when the judge was to make his decision. It was noticed that a score of Rangers were scattered through the courtroom at strategic points.

Judge Pleasants rose, a strong resolute man who knew well that he might be reading his own death sentence. As he did so, six Rangers walked down the aisle, Winchester rifles in their hands. Three of them stood on each side of the judge, slender brownfaced men as hard as ironwood, and faced a roomful of embittered feudsmen. Except for Hall's audacious capture of the indicted men the night before no such convincing demonstration of law had ever before been seen in DeWitt County.

The judge let his gaze travel slowly down the lines of hostile clansmen before he spoke. When he did so every word was cold, incisive, and implacable. He told them that DeWitt County was a disgrace to the state of Texas, that over it had roamed bands of armed men, committing terrible outrages and killing whom they pleased. "There are men in this room, not prisoners at the bar but free onlookers, who are murderers, bushwhackers, and assassins," he went on, again letting his eyes sweep the benches deliberately. "Without reviewing the long record of lawlessness, I shall tell you now that in Clinton and DeWitt County those evil days are past. . . . The foreman of our grand jury has been threatened for bringing the Rangers here. That responsibility is mine, and mine alone. . . . These men at the bar are committed to jail. Bail is denied them. Moreover, since the jail here is not strong enough the prisoners will be taken by Lieutenant Hall to Galveston for safekeeping."

JUDGE PLEASANTS had received anonymous letters to the effect that the men to kill him had been chosen if he did not release the prisoners. It is pleasant to recall that he lived for many years, an honored and respected citizen.

The case against one of the defendants was at last dropped. Two were acquitted, three convicted. Meador died before his trial. In the end those convicted escaped legal punishment on account of court technicalities.

But Dr. Webb, in his book "The Texas Rangers," tells an anecdote current for years. The arrested feudists were kept in jail so long that one of them ate peaches from a tree that sprouted from a seed dropped out of the window by him after eating the fruit brought him by his wife.

Whether this story was true or not, it is sure that the accused men were in prison a long time. During their incarceration the fires of passion died down. Men no longer walked in fear of their lives, for law had come to DeWitt County.

The Blockade Runners

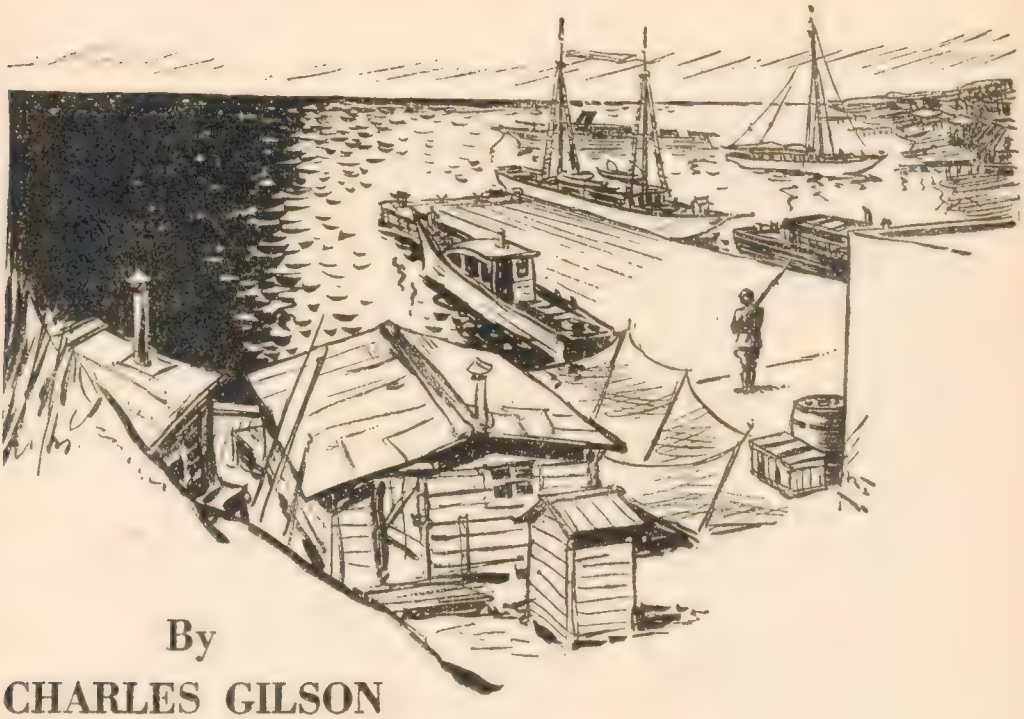
THE *Vaala* was a 2,500-ton packet with a smoke-stack well aft and a bridge like a pigeon-loft on top of a cow-house, which was the captain's cabin and chart-room. Owned by a Helsingfors firm that had been trading for years in timber and wood pulp from the Baltic to Leith in Scotland, Tynemouth and Hull, in England, she had accommodation for two passengers; and Walter S. Broome of the Philadelphia Fur Company was on board by courtesy of Captain Angus MacAndrew, and because, war or no war, somehow or other, he had to get back to the States.

There was very much of a war on, as he had every reason to know, being in the immediate vicinity, so to speak, and as Captain MacAndrew had made perfectly clear. Since in that sea floating mines were thick as fleas on a hen, Walter S. Broome was taking a very considerable risk, and he knew it. All the same he had infinite faith in his friend, Captain MacAndrew, and he had a kind of vague illogical impression that, because he himself was a neutral, no harm could befall the ship.

MacAndrew's position was paradoxical and somewhat peculiar. In the first place, though the skipper, he was the only Britisher on board, all his officers and crew being either Swedish or Finns. But the owners, who knew his worth, were loth to part with him at the outbreak of war, and he was no more anxious to go. They knew that they had no master more capable than he of piloting the old *Vaala* safely through the Skagerrak, while he for his part had served them for twenty years and had never had a complaint.

"Besides," as he explained to Broome, the night before they sailed, "it's no matter now whether it's a Finn or a Turk on the

An American Salesman and the British Skipper of a Torpedoed Ship See Their Own Bit of the War



By
CHARLES GILSON

bridge, or a Hielander, the same as meself. Nor is it here or there what freight we're carrying, contraband or no, for they are sinking at sight every neutral ship that carries a cargo for Britain, and there's more than one that has gone doon already that were bound for a neutral port. So I hope ye appreciate the fact, young man, that you're taking a mighty risk?"

"Well, Mac, it's a risk I guess I've got to take. We're halfway through October now, and I've no wish to be frozen up for the winter in the middle of a war that's no concern of ours."

"Ye're wise to keep out o' it. I'll no blame ye for that. But take no special pride on yeself that you've got the safest side o' the wurrld. If I can get ye safe to Leith, I might have the pride and pleasure of showing ye round the city o' Edinburgh. I hold one can tell a country by its capital, if ye possess the gift o' perspicacity. Which, strangely enough, is a word I can never pronounce in me cups."

Walter, who owed much of his business success to his perfect good manners, displayed not the ghost of a smile. Besides, in his heart he had a great respect for MacAndrew, who was a man of "perspicacity" himself. In addition to that, though over fifty years of age and not more than five foot-six in height, he was a kind of pocket Hercules, with a bull neck and a chest like a churn. He had a touseled head of grayish hair, a ragged mustache, and projecting bushy eye-brows, beneath which one could read the man's inherent honesty in his blue seaman's eyes.

"Edinburgh is one of the cities of the world I have always wanted to see," the American remarked, with truth. "I'm looking forward to seeing the Castle, Holyrood, and all I've read about in Scott."

"Aye, and ye shall, if we ever get there;

but I'll mention agin that the matter's open to doubt."

Walter S. Broome never did see Edinburgh. A disappointment, no doubt—but, after all, he was lucky to get back to Pennsylvania by a less romantic, if more adventurous, route.

Since his college days, as well as an exceptionally good linguist, he had always been an ardent student of literature. As the traveling agent of a big American firm he had had ample opportunities to read, and he had read both widely and well. Upon the journey upon which he was now embarked, instead of viewing scenes that he associated with Scott, Burns and Carlyle, he found himself hurled into a maelstrom in which he struggled successfully against the elemental forces of Nature after the fashion of the heroes of Victor Hugo and Conrad.

Yet, afterward, he questioned whether either Hugo or any other of the great romantic novelists would have stooped to rescue his hero by means of such a commonplace *deus ex machina* as a crateful of quacking ducks. Yet so it was, as we shall see, with Walter Broome of the Philadelphia Fur Company and Captain Angus MacAndrew.

AS SOON as he had gained open water at the mouth of the Gulf of Finland, the captain set a straight course for Stockholm. He had cargo for the Swedish capital, but his main idea was to get into Swedish territorial waters as soon as he could. Knowing that he would be safer within the three-mile limit, he crept up the coast through the Kattegat, and not until he was well north of Denmark did he change course southwest by south.

During this time Broome saw enough of MacAndrew to know that the man slept now and again like a dog. Well fortified by whiskey, the wine of his native heath, he was on the bridge off and on, by day and night, in foul and foggy weather; and the only company Broome could find was those live ducks in a crate on the afterdeck. There was about a score of them, and unaware there was a war going on, they vented their indignation on a fellow neutral in no uncertain terms.

It was when they were well into the North Sea that Broome tumbled out of his bunk in the middle of the night, alarmingly and orally aware that the old *Vaala* had walked right into the middle of things that one doesn't forget in a hurry.

Scrambling into a greatcoat, he rushed on deck—to see searchlights stabbing a misty moonless sky, gun flashes from more than one direction on the starboard quarter, quick-firing anti-aircraft shells bursting like spraying rockets, and upon the swelling sea itself aerial bombs exploding on the surface.

Because of the constant and rapid firing he had not at first been able to hear the dull drone of heavy bombing planes revolving overhead; and no sooner had he discovered their existence than he realized that they were mounting higher and higher and bearing away to the south. Five minutes after he had appeared on deck, all was silent again. He had arrived in the theater, it seemed, in time to see the curtain fall; and then MacAndrew hailed him from the bridge.

"Did ye ever see the like of it!" the skipper exclaimed, as soon as Broome had joined him.

"Have you any idea, Mac, what it was all about?"

"I canna say for sure, but I've a kind of a notion. I were on the bridge when the overture opened, and by the light o' the bursting bombs I had a glimpse of a submarine that were the next thing to a derelict, and I've small doubt she were British. She had lost her periscope and part of her conning-tower, and she were crawling home like a lame duck in the dark. But she must have had her wireless intact, or else they had patched it up; for no sooner had the German bombers found her than the Royal Navy rolls up—in no in-

considerable force, as ye may have seen for yourself. There are more than destroyers there, for those anti-aircraft guns are mounted on cruisers or maybe battle-cruisers. Aye, man, and I'm telling ye, those guns are an awfu' invention, for they

make a pattern i' the sky like a round o' duck-shot, and I'm no blaming the Fritzes for preferring a get-away to being held by them searchlights. Man, but war's a dreadfu' thing, I'm no denying, but there's something aboot the affair that stirs the blood o' a Hielander!"

"I've Highland blood in me myself," Broome modestly admitted, thinking that thereby he would go up a peg or so in MacAndrew's estimation.

"Highland, ye call it! That's English. But no matter. Will ye tak' a cup o' coffee wi' me in the cabin? Olsen's safe on the bridge for a while. I'll no be able to snatch a wink o' sleep till daybreak."

THE cook being awake, they got what they wanted, though the captain flavored his coffee with something stronger. However, no sooner had they seated themselves at the saloon table than they were fixed by a searchlight from a British destroyer. The officer who came aboard to examine their papers before they were allowed to proceed warned them that there were U-boats in the neighborhood, though they ought to be safe enough as the sea was getting up and the wind rapidly rising.

And sure enough with the dawn came a northwesterly gale that cut through the North Sea blankety fog like the sharpened tines of a hack-saw, while the ship took on a roll that reminded Broome of a cigar he had once smoked under a hay-rick in Maine when he was eight years old.

All that day the wind never abated, the fog thickened, and they got not a glimpse of the sun. At about eight o'clock in the evening, after a supper he ate for the sake of appearances and immediately regretted, Walter Broome turned in; and no sooner had he stretched himself full length on his bunk in his clothes—for he felt too sick to undress—than he was pitched on his head on the floor.

At the same time he was conscious of a deafening explosion, of a kind of shuddering that went throughout the ship from stem to stern, as she slewed round like a tyro skater on ice; and then every light on board was suddenly extinguished.

Already dressed, Broome was on deck in less than a minute, where he found MacAndrew and Olsen, the second mate, who was taking the first watch.

His question was unnecessary, for he already knew the answer.

"What's happened?" he asked.

"Torpedoed," MacAndrew growled. "Did ye think we'd run down a herring? They've missed us amidships, but they've taken the propeller and snapped the shaft like a straw. Good enough shooting in weather like this! All we got to do now is to stand by and see what happens next. We're fair crippled, and the engine-room's flooded."

"Are we going down?" Broome asked—another question that was rather a waste of breath.

"Maybe, we'll keep afloat for some time, unless they think we're worth another torpedo, and in that case we'd stand as good a chance as a lump o' lard in hell. Ye see, the rudder's gone wi' the propeller, and that means we're adrift in a northwester and shipping water through the shaft every time we pitch. All I can do is to hoist jury rigs on the fore and main. If we run before the wind, we may keep an even keel. It's lucky we carry a cargo o' wood; but, man, I'm telling ye, I canna do aught wi' a crippled ship but trust to God A'mighty."

While the crew got to work with sails that were as erratic and unmanageable as sheets of paper in a windy street, there followed an anxious quarter of an hour. They knew the submarine that had fired on them was somewhere near. Ten to one she was on the surface, though they could see no sign of her because of the darkness. There was an off-chance that she also had lost them, for it was a night when no man could tell where the dark sea ended and the lowering sky began.

Then the ray of a searchlight swept clean over them, to swing round to the north like the stroke of a scythe. And after that came darkness again.

MacANDREW took in a deep breath, and when he spoke he might have been muttering a prayer.

"If that were not the hand o' Providence," he murmured, "then I ha' lost all faith in my Maker! That searchlight missed us when we were down in the trough o' the sea. They know well enough they got the torpedo home, and they'll be heiling Hitler now for sending us slick to the bottom. Sinking without trace they call it, in their own lingo, and it's not exactly the kind of a custom that appeals to the heart o' a sailor. One time there was a sort o' fraternity between us seafaring folk, but it's mighty different now. I could never lower a boat in a sea like this, and they know that well enough."

Broome was thinking more of the predicament in which they found themselves than how it had come to pass.

"How long, do you think, can we keep afloat?" he asked.

"How the hell do I know that?" the skipper snapped. "I reckon I've done all I can. If we don't settle down afore, we'll run before the wind till we break up somewhere on the Danish coast. I'm no betting man meself, but I'd lay a sheet-anchor to a hairpin ye never set eyes on a skyscraper again. Howbeit, young man, will ye bear in mind I warned ye fair."

"I admit that," said Broome. "I accepted the risk, and I don't regret it—not even now. If we go down I die in good company."

"Aye, that's a seaman's way o' looking at it. And all neutrals aboard—saving only meself!"

He left suddenly, being summoned by the first engineer to examine the engine-room, where he found at least six foot of water. In spite of that, when he returned to Broome at the foot of the bridge steps, he was in a more optimistic mood.

"Where there's life there's hope," he observed. "There's no reason that I can see why we should flood above the shaft-tunnel. It's a mighty fortunate thing the engines are well aft. The forward holds are flooded, but they are filled with timber and that gives us buoyancy we'd lack if we had a heavier cargo. There's a list aft, but that's natural, and all the better. The engines may be awash and out o' action, but she's got her nose in the air like a dog begging for biscuits. Aye, man, and I'm telling ye, I'm proud o' the old *Vaala!*"

The next few hours gave proof of both the wisdom and the seamanship of Captain Angus MacAndrew. None the less, they were hours of stress, extreme strain and terrible anxiety for everyone on board, Walter Broome included. Driven before a wet, howling wind, the ship held a course—they knew not whither. In such a gale there was every chance that at any moment the jury sails might go, and that was all they had to keep them headed before the wind. With the storm beam, she must sooner or later turn turtle or settle down by the stern.

It was a night when every man aboard awaited sudden death in the cold and bitter darkness. Yet the crew gathered on the fo'c's'le huddling close together, for no man dared go below. They had made a raft out of the deck-cargo timber, square-cut beams and pit-props lashed together; and knowing they could do no more than that, they settled down to sing songs of

Finland, of freedom as their rightful heritage, though even then the Russian fleet lay at Kronstadt, watching a blackened and deserted Helsingfors. They were drenched in spray, their mingled notes were swept away by the storm; but the sound of their own voices gave them courage and something of hope.

They were at the mercy of a force more relentless, more irresistible, more impossible to combat than the fanatical advocates of extremist political creeds, who acknowledged no right but might, who preferred blood to the ballot-box. For the ship was but a straw, even as a candle, in the wind. There was no one on the bridge; no man at the wheel—which was as useless as the rudder they had left in splinters miles astern.

A look-out man on the fo'c's'le peak strained his eyes in the smarting darkness, seeing naught in the spray that flew from the bows when the leaking stern lifted on a roller. And thus the old *Vaala* drove bravely onward to her doom.

The end came, like the torpedo that had maimed them, like a bolt from out of the blue. It was then about four in the morning, though no man on board had taken heed of time.

Broome—and the gods were with him—was on the bridge with MacAndrew. Olsen and the third mate had gone below for coffee. Borne forward by the running waves like an empty cart behind a bolting horse, the ship groaned in every rivet; like a human soul in torture, breasting the waves only because her wooden cargo in the forward holds floated high against the hatches. Then she struck, head on, against a floating mine that exploded like a volcano in a watery crater, to blow the forecastle into flying splinters in a sheet of flame, while twisted plates were hurtled all ways into the fog like the segments of a shell. Shattered, both fore and aft, the ship went down. The sea swallowed her. In a few seconds there was not a sign of her to be seen—had there been any superhuman entity at the back of that clammy, raging blackness to behold her sudden fate.

In that brief space of time, first Broome, and then MacAndrew, had jumped from the bridge. When the American came to the surface, he gave himself about ten minutes—time to reckon up the debts he owed, the women he had loved, and the sins he had never committed. And by the time he had written "payment deferred" to the debit balance, he heard not far away from him a weird squawking noise that he thought at first had something to do with the wind.

MacAndrew and he must have been born under the same lucky star—these two and a crateful of panicky ducks, for how else should all have come together in that swirling, rushing darkness?

The crate, being aft, had not been shattered by the explosion and had floated free from the sinking ship, which had gone down on a more or less even keel; and when Broome realized that his fellow neutrals, the ducks, were somewhere thereabout, he struck out in that direction. He was a strong swimmer, and he never had better cause to be glad of it than now. And it was then, when he was swimming, that a kind of orange blob appeared at the back of the fog, to remind him there was a moon somewhere outside this revolving death-trap of a world, and that the planets themselves had not been hurled out of their orbits.

When he saw the crate he grasped it, hung on to it, and then hauled himself half out of the water—only to be swung up and down, down and up, in the midst of a sudden nothingness, to be tossed like a cork, battered and heaved, until he felt as if all his internal anatomy were banging about inside him like the clapper of a bell.

He was hanging on for dear life, when on a sudden MacAndrew came out of the sea like a walrus—for he was a man with a huge drooping mustache that, like his hair, had once been red, but was now turning gray. Broome gave him a hand, to

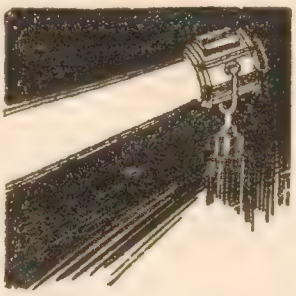
help him save himself and drown the ducks that had been the means of saving them both. And there the two of them lay, side by side, clinging on to the crate that was well awash and breathing whenever they could, each taking a chance as to whether he swallowed a mouthful of salt water or fog.

THERE was no chance of speaking, and after all there wasn't much to be said. It was a situation in which a man could do some solemn and solid thinking. And MacAndrew was quite capable of that.

He reflected, in the first place, that there was little hope for his men, many of whom had served under him for years. At the time of the explosion most of them had been on the forecastle, and that had been blown sky high. The few who were below had most certainly been drowned—no miracle could have saved them such as had befallen Walter Broome and himself. Of those who were on deck, however, some few might have survived by being hurled into the water. It was not impossible that the raft was still intact, though those who could swim would be lucky if they found it. The only hope for any one of them who might be clinging to some wreckage or the raft itself was that the wind dropped and the sky cleared at sunrise, when they might have the luck to be picked up by a passing ship. As for Broome and himself, though saved for the time being, they were at the mercy of the elements, shuffled like dice in a box when the stakes were life and death. If the wooden crate broke, they were lost; but it appeared to be strong as a cage.

The American, also, was thinking—but his was a mind more introspective, less practical. He was thinking of himself and MacAndrew as two human entities, as just specks of flotsam in the heart of a raging, watery chaos; and it did not seem to him then as a matter of infinite importance whether or not they survived.

Was this a world worth living in? Had so-called civilization existed a matter of some eight thousand years to come to this! Where was the sense in it all—being born, having hopes, ambitions, ideals, only to be drowned like a rat, and no one a penny the worse? Then, upon a sudden, there came a quick transition of his feelings that he could in nowise explain. Though his teeth were chattering with the cold, he felt with-



in him a burning flow of sullen indignation that seemed to change the very composition of his blood. And he was a neutral no longer.

It was then his companion spoke.

"Yon's the sun! The clouds are lifting to the east. Maybe, t'is the last sunrise you and I shall ever see. Maybe not. The ways and means o' Divine Providence are inscrutable and strange."

Broome never answered, but looked toward the east. The fog around them was suffused by a dull, opalescent light, through which to the eastward one could discern a faint tinge of red.

Though the wind was dying down, the seas still swept over them, and they had to breathe when they could. As the visibility improved with the spreading sunlight and the lifting mist, they saw white surf, flying high before them upon what might have been a school of humped-backed whales, vague and motionless in the half light of dawn. Then a wave gathered them up, swept them onward, as if by a broom, to dump them down on a sandy beach, where they lay battered, frozen, breathless, and bruised in every bone.

When another wave washed over them, Broome staggered to his feet and helped the skipper to his. Then they stood staring

at one another, like men but newly awakened from a dream, not knowing where they were. Neither spoke. Then, with a kind of doleful, yet astonished, amazement both looked down at the wood of the broken crate and the white dead ducks with their heads swinging back and forth in the backwash on the beach and their necks as flexible as string.

Suddenly MacAndrew pulled himself together, threw back his shoulders, and gripped his companion by an arm.

"Come!" he exclaimed. "Grab some of them ducks, as many as you can. They're food, at any rate. I'll take the rest. We've got to make higher ground and find out where we are."

Together they staggered forward, like two children who are learning to walk, stumbling up the slope of the beach, until they came to some rocks half buried in the sand. They had been washed ashore, it seemed, between two high sand-dunes at the foot of which there were rocks where the waves were breaking—twenty or thirty yards to either side, and they must have been dashed to death. Assuredly, as MacAndrew had said, the workings of Providence are strange.

A narrow whin-grown gully led to the top of one of the dunes; but before they had dragged themselves halfway up this, both flopped down from sheer exhaustion and lay where they had fallen, drenched and shivering, though now sheltered from the wind.

THIS time, after an interval of about ten minutes, it was MacAndrew who was the first to make a move. One after the other he picked up the drowned ducks, and told Broome to do the same.

"No sense in staying here," he observed, wiping a hand across his mustache and flicking the water from his finger-tips. "I've got a thirst that's near choking me. We must find water to drink."

"Have you any idea where we are?" Broome asked, lurching forward like a drunken man, with a bunch of ducks in each hand—a perfect figure of fun, had the circumstances of the case been different.

"Maybe, mainland; maybe, not. Who's to tell? There's the North Frisians, north o' the Bight of Helgoland, and by the look of it, we've been cast up on one of them. But I'm saying naught for certain. I'm no navigator, adrift on a crate o' ducks, but I should say we are well south o' the island of Sylt."

Broome opened his eyes.

"German territory!" he exclaimed, suddenly remembering things like passports.

"Aye, German now, but it used to be Danish. The Prussians grabbed Schleswig-Holstein in sixty-four. So ye see, young man, the leopard don't change his spots."

Broome never answered. He knew German history a lot better than MacAndrew, from the Peace of Tilsit to Munich, but this did not seem to him a suitable occasion on which to air his knowledge. What concerned him most for the moment was that he, an American citizen, having been first torpedoed and then blown up by a mine—eventualities he would never have conceived as even remotely possible in his home in suburban Philadelphia — now found himself practically marooned on a German island during a war that might change the face of a hemisphere.

That they were actually on an island was a fact proved beyond doubt but a few minutes later. Walking like two very decrepit old men, they at last reached the top of a high sandy ridge whence they could see across intervening water what was either the mainland or another and larger island. The sun had now risen and the wind had dropped with the dawn, and this, together with the exercise they had taken, had begun to warm the blood in their veins.

Suddenly MacAndrew threw himself flat on his face, and dragged Broome with him, literally threw him clean off his feet—the first intimation the American had of MacAndrew's physical strength.

"Lie close as a hare!" he whispered. "Show as much as the top of your head, and I'm for it! There's a sentry below us, not three hundred yards away, wearing a field gray uniform and a steel helmet. Man, but it's just as I said—we've hitched up on one of the German Frisians. You're all right, Broome, you're a neutral. But I wouldn't give much for the chance I've got. They're so propaganda-ed up to the eyebrows against what they call the 'English' that as like as not they might shoot an honest Scot at sight."

For the moment Broome could think of nothing to say, since his thoughts were none of the pleasantest. He might be a neutral, but he would have his work cut out to prove it. His passport, all his business papers and credentials were locked up in a cabin in a ship that now lay at the bottom of the North Sea. His identity was lost. His neutrality was drowned. Such reflections were far from comforting, and it took time to realize exactly where he was. Finally he came to the conclusion that, if he had to be in the war, he was on the side of the Allies, and in any case he would stick to Captain MacAndrew.

By that time, however, the skipper had crawled cautiously to a clump of gorse, where he peered between the prickly branches for several minutes before he beckoned Broome to his side.

"Observe," he remarked. "Observe, and draw your own conclusions. I'm no liking the look o' things meself."

Walter Broome observed a lot more than he had ever expected. At first his imagination had led him to the somewhat romantic hypothesis that he and his companion were castaways upon a desert island—but one glance was enough to convince him that that was far from the case.

The island—whatever it was called—was evidently a holiday resort in more salubrious times, whereas the permanent inhabitants were for the most part fisher-folk who in summer hired beach-chairs and let lodgings and by many similar methods extracted all the reichmarks they could from perspiring and sun-tanning citizens from Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein.

Being long and narrow, the island consisted of a series of hump-backed sandy hillocks, which in the distance and the half light of a misty dawn had resembled the backs of so many whales. How many miles it extended to right and left it was impossible to say, though it could not have been more than a mile and a half across, looking in an easterly direction.

On either side of the vantage point where Broome and the captain had established themselves were two bays, both facing west, with spacious golden beaches. On the shore of the southerly bay—which was that to their left—there was, first, a small fishing village almost immediately below them where there were a few simple cottages and tarred huts, as well as a semicircular stone-built mole and a wooden jetty. In the harbor under the lee of the mole several boats of all descriptions lay moored; and it was here that the armed field-gray sentry was marching up and down with that air of importance that is a sentry's privilege and perhaps his only consolation. Beyond this collection of humble dwellings there was a number of painted deserted bungalows, above which could be seen the roofs of one or two brick buildings. And beyond them again, on very much higher ground, was what was undoubtedly a fort.

AS FOR the other bay to the north, that was much the same sort of thing on a smaller scale: not more than a score of bungalows and another fort upon a hilltop, scarcely visible in the distance through the clearing fog, now flooded with the morning sunshine. A brief, if careful, survey of so much of the coastline as they were able to see supplied them with all the information they wanted, and a lot more than they liked. And what they couldn't see for themselves they were able to guess. In the first week of September, at the out-

break of war, the holiday crowd had vanished like flies in a sudden frost; their bungalows had all been shut up, and no one had remained in the place but a few of the older fishermen whose trade was now restricted to off-shore waters. A group of these blue-jerseyed ancients could be seen sitting at the end of the jetty, while one or two others strolled disconsolately along the deserted beach.

"Well," asked MacAndrew, after he had given Broome time to take it all in, "and what d'ye make of it?"

"A summer health resort," the American smiled, "and none too healthy for us."

"For me, ye mean. There'll be boats running from here to the mainland, Cuxhaven like as not. They've got to provision the forts. No reason why you shouldn't go down to the metropolis, ask to see the lord mayor, stick up for your rights as a neutral citizen of the United States, and arrange for a passage home."

"Sounds easy," Broome laughed, "but there are one or two snags. In the first place, I can't prove my nationality; secondly, I've no money worth mentioning, and thirdly, I mean to stick to you."

MACANDREW regarded him for several seconds, chewing his walrus-like mustache, with his weather-beaten face devoid of all expression. Then he held out a brown and horny hand.

"Ye're a good lad!" said he. "I've always thought so, and now I know it."

"No credit due to me, Mac. It's a case of Hobson's choice."

"It's a kind of compliment, for all that. Anyhow, I choose to take it that way. Mind ye, young man, I'm no holding out any vain prospects; but, if it's humanly possible to escape from this lost dogs'-home, you and me will do it. You're a strapping youngster, and I'm no weakling and never were. But we got to go about the matter wi' caution and perspicacity, so to speak. Can ye speak German, by the way?"

Broome nodded.

"I wouldn't have the job I've got, if I couldn't," he replied.

"Good! There's no denying a lot can be made o' that. As for me, though I've been a steamship skipper for more'n thirty years, there's little I don't know about sailing a boat, and there's one down at yon mole that I've got my eye on already. We'll be shot if we're caught; but, speaking for meself, I'm ready to take the risk."

"And I, too," said Broome.

"Then all we got to do is to play a waiting game; and anyway, we can do naught till we've found a safe place to hide. But that should be easy enough. We've more or less got the hinterland all to ourselves."

THEY soon discovered that, so long as they stayed among the sand dunes, they had little or nothing to fear. Upon the long sandy ridge between the two fortified hillocks there was not a footprint to be found. The very finest seaside turf grew in the narrow valleys, and beyond the dunes, on lower ground to the east, they found a stream where they were able to quench their thirst.

Fortunately all that day the sun shone, and they were able to dry their clothes; and after that, for the next four days, they led a kind of Robinson Crusoe existence, except that there was not a minute that was not fraught with some sort of excitement. Their hiding-place was a natural dug-out, which Broome described as the best bunker on the course; for, being a keen, low-handicapped golfer, he had already recognized that this place was a first-class golf links wasted. By night they hunted on the beach for driftwood for a tiny fire upon which they cooked the ducks, after they had dried their matches. Also they had the luck to find a toy bucket without a handle that did well enough for their water. By night they carried out their scouting expeditions, venturing as near the mole as they dared. Being careful not to be seen by the sentry, MacAndrew took stock of the craft at anchor, drew his own

conclusions, and kept them to himself. As they were determined to take no risks, one or other of them was always on watch by day, lying flat on his face among the whins on top of the dunes.

By the end of three days they had got the lay of the land and had learnt what

was going on. Several fishing-boats put out every morning, but never ventured far out to sea; and the fishermen had the laudable habit of turning in early at night—which left the field open to the captain and Walter Broome. Indeed, after seven o'clock in the evening there was not a light to be seen in the village. There appeared to be a complete and permanent black-out; there was a new moon in the middle of the month, and every night was cloudy. Hence after dark they were free to go more or less where they liked, provided they avoided the attention of the sentry on the mole, whose relief was sent down from the fort every two hours.

"It would be easy as picking cherries," the American remarked, "if only we had a supply of food. You and I could knock that sentry over the head and do a quick get-away in one of the boats."

"Aye," MacAndrew replied, "I've got my eye on the craft I want. Food and an easterly wind, them two are essentials. We've got to wait for the wind; that will come, but the grub won't. As a matter o' fact I've got a strategical plan o' campaign, as it might be called. It's dangerous, I'm no denying; but, seeing that you can speak German, it ought to work."

After that, he sat silent a while, ruminating, sucking his great mustache.

"Well, Mac," Broome asked, at last, "and what's the great idea?"

"I've remarkable long sight," the skipper went on. "What I see I observe, and from what I observe I draw my own conclusions. F'rinstance, in the mornings I've noticed women wi' baskets coming and going from that house with a red roof on the far side of the village. Now, what would they be doing, but shopping? And what could they buy in a place like this, but groceries and the like? Sausages, smoked hams, canned salmon, coffee!" Here the captain smacked his lips, again sucked his mustache, and turned his blue eyes heavenward, before he could continue. "Man, but I'm thinking such-like commodities would be an agreeable an' appetising change from a diet o' burnt ducks. O'course, we've no house-breaking implements; but we're in a country, remember, where a uniform is worth a deal more than a jemmy, and no sane man would swap a brown shirt for a bunch o' skeleton-keys. It's at the back of me mind that we might call on the grocer at midnight and demand an entry in the name o' the Reich or the Secret Police. I'm counting, mind ye, on the fear they've got of what goes by the name of the Law."

Having thus disclosed the greater part of his strategical plan, he lay on his back, gazed at the sky, and waited for Broome to answer.

Not unnaturally Broome hesitated. He realized the risk, and the consequences, if they failed; but he also recognized their chance of success; and anyway, so far as he could see, it was a risk they would have to take.

"Well," he said, at last, "I'm with you, Mac. I said that at the beginning, and I'm not going back on you now."

"Good!" exclaimed the captain. "And what's even better is that the wind's veered round to the east. It will be off-shore by sunset; and that means that we can get to work tonight."

For hours that afternoon they talked the whole thing out, discussing every

detail. A private yacht, of about twenty-five tons and ketch-rigged, lay tied up at the mole. She had evidently been left there in charge of one of the fishermen when her owner had hurried back to the Fatherland at the beginning of the war. MacAndrew thought it as likely as not that she had an auxillary engine, but of that he couldn't be sure, and in any case the chances were that there was no fuel on board.

"Ye may be no kind of a sailor," he observed to Broome, "but I have small doubt ye can take hold o' a rope or a tiller and do as I tell you. We two ought to be able to handle her. Understand, I'm speaking of a matter within me own special province. That's a craft well to my liking, trim and easy to handle. I've no special desire to take to the open sea and run two blockades in a row-boat. We did a grand voyage, you and me, on a crate o' ducks, but that were an experience I've no wish to repeat."

Broome frankly conceded that much, and having received his instructions, settled down for a few hours sleep in their bunker, where he and the skipper had for three days been objects of offended curiosity to a colony of rabbits.

They left their hiding-place among the sand-dunes at about half past eleven that night, there being a gentle breeze off-shore, as MacAndrew had predicted; and twenty minutes later, they lay hidden among the whins, not more than fifty yards from the end of the mole.

There was no moon, and not a light to be seen anywhere along the coast. Nor was there any sound to be heard, save the rhythmic wash of the waves and the heavy footsteps of the sentry who was marching up and down to keep himself warm, sometimes approaching to within twenty yards of them.

Their eyes being accustomed to the semi-darkness, they were able to make out their more immediate surroundings. The starlight breaking fitfully through the thin high clouds, they could see a shifting gleam upon the restless, broken water; the dark shadow of the mole stood out in strong relief, with the yacht, the fishing-boats and dinghies that were made fast to the jetty.

MacAndrews mumbled in an undertone.

"None too good!" he whispered. "The tide's setting, and that's going to count against us. However, one can't have it all ways. In for a penny, in for a pound. I'm putting me trust in Providence and the shape of me fist."

After that he was silent awhile—until he gave his companion a gentle nudge in the ribs. But there was no need to call Broome's attention to the fact that the crucial moment had arrived; for he also had heard the approaching footsteps of two or more men who were coming in their direction.

Lying flat on their faces, they waited, expectant, conscious of their danger, straining their eyes in the darkness, in which they could presently make out the figures of three men—three men who marched in step without exchanging a word.

Here was another unpleasant surprise. The fact that the approaching N.C.O. had two men with him meant that there was another sentry somewhere, though as likely as not he was posted on the other side of the town. In any case, there were now four armed soldiers within a stone's-throw of them—and they hadn't even a jack-knife between the two of them! As he flattened himself against the ground, Walter S. Broome was almost painfully aware of the fact that his heart was beating faster than he liked.

The sentry was formally relieved in the ordinary way. The man on duty had apparently nothing to report. Orders were given; a few brief words of command rapped out—and then the little party marched off the way they had come, leaving the new man on duty at the end of the mole.

MacAndrew allowed a good five minutes to pass before he ventured to speak to his friend in a whisper.

"We've got to bide our time," he said. "If I can get within reach of him when he's looking the other way, we've got him. Keep close astern, and as soon as I've got him down, ram the gag in his mouth. But that's not yet. Have ye ever seen a cat stalking a bird? Well, that's how it is with us."

Broome groped in his pocket for the gag they had made out of a piece of cork they had found on the beach and a strip of MacAndrew's shirt. Another five minutes passed, during which time neither moved his eyes from the sentry, whose figure was sometimes vague, sometimes clear, as the man moved from place to place. Presently the man did the very thing they wanted: instead of patroling the quay between the stone mole and the jetty, he turned and walked slowly to the very end of the mole, where he was soon lost to sight.

MacAndrew, crouching so that he was doubled almost in half, slipped forward like a great questing cat to which he had compared himself. Broome followed. On the mole were various empty oil drums, a pile of square-cut stones, and several sacks of sand. Evidently workmen had been doing some repair work that had been interrupted by the war. MacAndrew selected the stones because they were well in the shadow—and there he and his companion again bided their time.

They heard the footsteps of the sentry coming back again. He was marching stiffly, as if on parade, with regular paces. Probably one of the veterans of the last war who had had years of military training. The goose-step was in his blood.

As he passed them, unconscious of his danger, the skipper sprang at him like a tiger, took him from behind, with his right arm crooked around the man's throat and his knee in the small of his back. The sentry's rifle fell from his hand, clattering on to the quay, and his steel helmet would have fallen, too, had it not been for the chin-strap. The powerful and unrelenting pressure of MacAndrew's forearm under his chin, slowly forcing his head backward, preventing him from crying out for help; and then, as he gasped open-mouthed for breath, Broome thrust the cork gag between his teeth.

The whole business was over in a few seconds. The sentry lay helpless on the flat of his back, while MacAndrew relieved him of his boots and Broome, straddling his chest, gave him a few words of advice in his own language.

"Best not make a fuss about it," he said. "All we want is your clothes. If we have any nonsense, we'll be obliged to knock you over the head."

The unfortunate man had obviously not the least desire to be knocked over the head, or anywhere else. Though he was more or less powerless to resist, no one could have been more amenable—indeed, so far as he could in the circumstances, he did everything possible to assist them to remove his clothing, which he seemed even eager to get rid of. Obligingly he sat up to have his tunic taken off, and lifted his legs to let them pull off his trousers. He seemed as terrified as mystified by the whole affair, and infinitely preferred the loss of his trousers to his consciousness.

All this was easy enough to explain, as both Broome and the skipper had already seen for themselves, though the man's uniform presented a problem for which they were in no way prepared. The simplicity and ease with which they had bagged their quarry was to be accounted for by the fact that the German was well past the prime of life and as soft as a packet of butter. A man some years older than MacAndrew, he was hardly any taller, and any muscles he had ever had had now run to fat—evidently a landwehr reservist called up for garrison service; a corpulent, homely little man who had no more wanted war than anyone else in the world and who was less fitted for its hardships than most.

And that was why his clothes presented a problem. Walter Broome was tall

and thin with the figure of the athlete he had been in his college days, not many years gone by, though the only recreation he now enjoyed was golf—whenever he got the chance. His treasured golf-clubs, by the way, had gone down on the *Vaala*—but that was no concern of MacAndrew's. What did concern them both was that it was now obvious that Broome could never get into the sentry's uniform without looking like the mad Marx brother in an elongated mirror, and the fact that he had a four-day growth on his chin did not exactly improve his personal appearance.

The skipper, too, had not shaved since they had left Helsingfors, with the result that his leathery countenance resembled a badly trimmed hedge in which two divergent and remarkably healthy branches, representing his huge mustache, had remained untouched by the shears.

For a minute or so they discussed the matter, sitting on the mole with the supine figure of the sentry between them, wearing nothing but his underclothes.

"I've got to don those togs meself," MacAndrew remarked, "and it's only right that I should. Reckon, I won't look a lot like any kind of a soldier; but, while you do the talking, I look as fierce as hell."

"And who am I supposed to be?" Broome asked, conscious that much depended upon whether or not he was able to play his part.

"That's all fixed. I don't change course unless I have to. You're one o' the Gestapo, one of Hitler's extra-special trained sleuth-hounds. Fact is, you're so extra-special you're on the job day and night, and you haven't been able to find time to shave. Anyway, you don't want a manicure-set to knock out a grocer in wartime this hour o' the night. I know my way to the house, and we'll see what to do when we get there."

"And in the meantime," asked Broome, pointing to the sentry, "what are we to do with this chap?"

MacAndrew looked around, until his eyes fell on the ketch-rigged private yacht. She lay, anchored forward, about fifteen yards from the quay, to which she was attached by a heavy rope made fast to a bollard.

"Trim, ship-shape, and handy," he remarked. "She's got an auxiliary engine, too, and if there's fuel aboard, we could ask for nothing better. Man, but I'm telling ye, the very sight o' her takes me back to my boyhood, when I was a foredeck hand on a clipper. I've been in steam now for more'n thirty years, but there's still sail in me heart."

"That may be," said Broome, after a pause; "but you haven't yet answered my question. Are we going to leave this fellow here?"

MacAndrew came out of his reverie, and began to scramble into the German's uniform.

"No," said he. "There's small chance that he will be found, until his relief comes at two o'clock, but we're taking no more chances than we must. We'll find somewhere to stow him away, where he'll be snug and cozy."

•

THEN his eyes fell on a motorboat that was tied up at the jetty.

"Hoots!" he exclaimed. "I never saw that before! We'll have to see to that before we get under way. We don't want to be overhauled by a damned floating taxi-cab before we're clear of the harbor. For the time being it will do well enough for a guard-room. If we tie him under the thwarts, our friend here will be out of the wind and snug as a flea in a rug."

While MacAndrew changed his clothes with the sentry, Broome went down to the motorboat. What the skipper had insultingly called a damned floating taxicab proved to be Gar Wood's latest design, shining with varnish. So another wealthy Hamburger had been obliged to leave in a hurry!

Removing the tarpaulin over the stern, Broome at once got to work on the engine. Finding a spanner, he began to unscrew the plugs, with the idea of throwing them into the sea, when the skipper turned up with their prisoner.

Finding a short length of rope, he tied the man to the forward thwart, leaving the gag in his mouth. Then he went to Broome, who told him that he had already thrown three spark-plugs overboard.

"Then get on with it!" MacAndrew growled. "But I reckon, I know a better way. Ye never knew, I presume, that I'm a bit of a mechanic."

His knowledge of mechanics apparently were both violent and crude, but none the less extremely efficient. Seizing the magneto leads, he wrenched them away by force, at the same time tearing out the whole of the front of the magneto.

"That's done the trick!" said he. "And now, if you're at liberty, we'll go and call on the grocer."

SIDE by side, as if they had every right to be there, they turned from the darkened houses along the waterfront into the one and only street in the village that, running parallel to the shore, led to the bungalow-town beyond. They did not creep along stealthily like a couple of thieves; it might even be said they marched, though MacAndrew wisely made no attempt to keep in step with the long strides of his companion.

An amazing and strangely-assorted couple in very truth! The sight must have been ludicrous, if their engagement was heroic. A lean, lanky American, looking more like a hobo than a successful young business man. And a Scotch sea-captain, wearing the uniform and the helmet of a German private soldier and carrying a rifle as if it were a fishing-rod. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza reincarnated to play their parts in the Great War of 1939 in which chivalry was at a discount!

The captain had located the house they wanted as being the third from the end on the left side of the street; and in spite of the darkness, they had no difficulty in finding it. But, first, they made sure that the other sentry that they knew was somewhere about was nowhere in that particular neighborhood.

Sure enough, it was a grocery, though the blinds of the shop windows were down and no light was showing anywhere else, either on the upper floor or at the back. The name of the proprietor, they were just able to ascertain, was Schmidt. So much the better. If they found themselves in a difficulty, they might be able to excuse themselves on the plea that they had mistaken this highly estimable son of the Fatherland for a more reprehensible Herr Schmidt. Even the Gestapo sometimes made mistakes.

Entering a yard at the back, littered with the inevitable empty boxes, barrels and crates, they discovered a door that evidently connected with the kitchen premises in the private part of the house. This exactly fitted in with their ideas, as they had no wish to awaken the whole street by ringing the shop bell. But, before knocking on the back door, they first examined the windows on either side. If they could get into the place silently and surprise Herr Schmidt in his bed, so much the better. It was at this juncture that Broome made a discovery that, comparing their own adventure with that of civilized progress, equalled, or even excelled, the discoveries of Columbus, Galileo, Einstein or anyone else.

Broome had passed round the corner to the left of the door, to remain for a few breathless moments listening at a shuttered window, where there was not even a

shaded light visible through the cracks. In less than three minutes he had rejoined MacAndrew on the other side of the back door.

"Come here!" he whispered, taking the helmeted sea-captain gently by an arm. "I've found out something that looks too good to be true."

On tipe-toe they moved round the corner, where they crouched at the shuttered window. The whole house was in complete darkness—there was no doubt about that. Yet beyond the window they were just able to hear a radio set tuned in so softly that they were unable to catch more than an occasional word. These words, being in French, did not at first convey very much to the skipper; but Broome, being somewhat quicker in the uptake and understanding French, knew already exactly where they were.

"Grande activité . . . Moselle et la Sarre . . . prise sous nos feux . . . penétré. . . . Ici Paris mondial . . ."

That was enough—enough for Broome, at any rate, who gripped the captain by an arm.

"Got him!" he gasped. "Got him hooked like a fish! Fate has played into our hands. Talk of Divine Providence, Mac, this is just about the divinest thing that ever happened to two guys in a fix where they never ought to be!"

BUT MacAndrew was still bewildered. "How have we got him?" he asked.

"Why, good heavens, Mac, don't you realize the fellow's listening to a foreign broadcast! It's against the law and it's mighty dangerous, but there must be thousands like him. He's not inclined to swallow all he gets from Berlin. Maybe, he's got a son in the Siegfried Line, and he wants to know what's happening; he wants to see the other side of the picture. So he turns out all the lights, to pretend he has gone to bed, and he has tuned in Paris on the short wave. He's probably getting London, too, or New York. Anyway, he's a man who wants to think for himself; and as that's just the one thing the almighty Gestapo won't allow him to do, this is where we step in. You and me, Mac—the Gestapo! Think of it! As the maximum penalty's death, he'll be scared stiff at the very sight of us. I'm one of Himmler's big shots, and the fact that I don't trouble to shave isn't going to make any difference. We can have all the food we want for the asking. I'm sorry for the poor guy in a way, but we won't frighten him long."

And thereupon our military-nautical Sancho Panza did the next thing to embrace his knightly master. Placing both hands upon Broome's shoulders, MacAndrew hugged him like a bear, and then punched him so violently in the ribs that it actually hurt.

"Aye, man," he exclaimed, "but you're great! You're just enormous! It's something more, d'ye understand, than a mere matter o' genius," he went on, beside himself with excitement. "I look upon ye as something after the manner o' the godlike representation of the reverse of a Jonah—whatever that may mean. I'm no saying for certain, for I don't know, but it's something unique. Just watch me bash in yon door! I feel as if I were standing on the very roof o' the wurrld and could kick the top off Mount Everest as I would slice the head off a thistle!"

And thereupon the captain, suiting the action to the word, let fly with a foot at the back door of Herr Schmidt's establishment; and so violent was this onslaught that he not only burst open the lock but shifted one of the hinges. He seemed not to care in the least whether anyone heard him or not, but forced his way into a kitchen, closely followed by Broome.

Opening a door to the left, they entered a room that was pitch dark. They could see nothing. The radio had just that moment been switched off. However both were conscious that there was someone else in the room.

Broome had a few matches left, and one

of these he struck, lighting a candle that he saw on a table before him. Before them stood a pale anaemic-looking man, wearing a kind of smoking-cap with a tassel that had probably belonged to his grandfather. He was staring at them open-mouthed and open-eyed, and he made no attempt to speak.

Broome immediately got to work, speaking in German. He knew that they had no time to waste. He represented himself as a member of the dreaded Gestapo—and the circumstance that he was accompanied by a uniformed soldier seemed to bear this out. The fact that nobody could have looked less like a soldier than Captain Angus MacAndrew did not seem to occur to the unfortunate man who might have been under the impression that his last hour had come.

HE COULD not deny that he had been listening in to the French news—the set, on being switched on again, proved to be tuned in on the Paris short wavelength. He admitted he knew the penalty, that every German was forbidden to listen to foreign, especially enemy, broadcasts. He knew, also, as Broome was inhuman enough to remind him, that, if he passed on the news he had heard to anyone, he was liable to be put up against a wall and shot.

By that time he was stone-gray in the face from sheer terror. He had made no attempt to defend himself. All he could mumble was, "I know, *mein herr*, I know." But what he did not know was that by this time he had come to the end of his torture.

Broome had already made up a cock-and-bull story that he thought would serve well enough. He said that he must return the following day and confiscate the set. He had to do his duty. At the same time, he and his military escort had just landed from one of the other islands, where for four days they had been hunting down a man who had been guilty of a similar offence. The fellow had escaped, though they had searched for him everywhere; but during that time they had had practically nothing to eat and were well nigh starving. If the grocer would let them have what food they needed, they would not report him. Even a conscientious member of the secret police was human. He had a stomach that had to be filled, duty or no duty. The grocer could take his choice: the loss of some of his stock in trade or five years in prison.

The unhappy and deluded man never argued. Indeed, he obviously thought himself lucky to get off so easily, and a vestige of color came back into his thin, bloodless face. Feebly he waved a hand toward the door that connected with the shop, and then subsided into a chair.

MacAndrew took the candle. As he passed up the two steps that led to the front of the premises, he whispered to Broome.

"Man, but ye play your cards like a master! He would sit by like a tame cat and let us help ourselves to everything he's got. If we can get clear o' the harbor before the sentry's relief comes down from the fort, we'll have the feast of our lives!"

Five minutes later they emerged with two sacks filled with bottles, cans, paper packets and cardboard boxes. They had beer to drink, and to eat, sausages, hams, sardines, cheeses, jams, vegetables and flour. Two fat sacks crammed with loot—and it had all been done by bluff!

As they passed through the back room, however, on their way to the kitchen, Broome took pity on their victim, whom they found as they had left him, sitting limp in a chair.

Placing both hands on the man's shoulders, the American spoke in a voice less harsh, in which there was even a trace of suppressed humor.

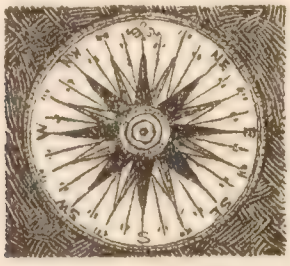
"Never fear, my friend," he said. "We won't bother you again. You may be quite certain of that."

Needless to say, he proved as good as his word. Together they passed through

the darkened streets on their way back to the mole.

WHEN they got to their destination, they calculated they had the best part of three quarters of an hour to board the yacht and get under way. MacAndrew had already realized that they would want every minute of that. The very moment they had come into the street, some inexplicable nautical instinct, rather than any one of his five senses, advised him that the wind had dropped, though it mercifully held in the same direction. But it was not until they had regained the mole that he made known his fears to Broome.

"We've got our work cut out to get clear before the relief turns up," said he. "Dump that cargo on the quay, while I get out of this coat. I doubt if there's wind enough against the set of the tide, but that remains to be seen."



As he was speaking, he took off the field-gray tunic and deposited this, together with the steel helmet and rifle, on the sack of provisions he had taken from the grocer's shop.

Then he made a brief inspection of the quay, satisfying himself that the corpulent sentry was still safely stowed under the thwarts of the motorboat.

"No luck!" he exclaimed to Broome, as soon as he had rejoined his companion. "There's not a dinghy or a boat that we can use—and that means there's only one way of getting aboard. Stand by and give me a hail, if ye see anyone coming."

The stern of the yacht lay a good fifteen yards off the mole. Apart from the fact that she was too heavy to haul in on the bollard, she was anchored forward. The rope looked taut as a fiddle-string; yet, when the skipper threw his weight upon it and began to work his way hand over hand toward the counter, the rope sagged, and before he was over the rudder he had been waist-deep in water.

Agile as a monkey or a man half his age, he swung himself on board.

First, he went below to have a look at the engine. It was a handy little four-cylinder concern, taking up very little space, which would serve its purpose all right, provided he could find fuel. He thought it probable that there was some somewhere on board; but, failing to find it at once and knowing that he had not much time to spare, he went forward along the deck to the capstan, where he stood scratching his head.

After a few moments reflection, he came to the conclusion that to weigh anchor was more than he dared do. There were houses not sixty yards away, and the noise would be sure to wake somebody up. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to let anchor go—and even that was not going to be easy.

Descending into the fo'c's'le and taking a box of matches out of his pocket—recently the property of Herr Schmidt—he had the luck to find nearly everything he wanted. From the floor he picked up a heavy spanner, coated with rust, and curiosity prompting him to remove a tarpaulin that looked suspicious, he discovered about half a dozen five-liter cans of gasoline. So he could work the auxilliary engine, if it came to a pinch; and having seen already that there was nothing like the wind he wanted, he expressed his satisfaction by means of a grunt.

It took him but a few minutes to knock out a shuttle with the spanner and let out the anchor chain through the hawser-pipe. This he did slowly, using all his strength, with the idea of making as little noise as possible.

When the end of the chain had dropped

into the water, he hurried aft again, where, with both hands to his mouth, he spoke in a hushed, strained whisper to Broome who stood waiting for him at the bollard on the quay.

"She's all clear for'ard. I've slipped the anchor. Lay hold of that rope, take a turn of it over a shoulder, and pull like hell. As there're no derricks, we've got to ship our cargo over the counter."

Broome obeyed. Untwisting the rope from the bollard, he tied the end of it round his waist like the top weight in a tug-of-war team, and began to heave. Leaning forward, he strained and pulled until the heavy rope grated against his collar-bone and his feet slipped on the smooth stones. But he gained ground by inches, conscious that the boat was moving slowly behind him, until he got the word from MacAndrew that the stern was right up against the quay.

One after the other he handed the two sacks of plunder to the captain, and then followed himself, carrying the German tunic, helmet, rifle and equipment.

MacAndrew had never waited for him. Hastening for'ard, he had already hoisted the fore stay-sail, the hanks on the fore-stay making more noise than he liked.

"If they never heard that," he muttered to himself, "they're better sleepers than hogs!"

Amidships he paused to listen, with his tousled head cocked sidewise like a sheep dog.

"Not a sound!" said he to Broome. "If you had told me that I could get a boat under way in the dead o' night within a cable's length of a score of sleeping sailors, I'd never have believed it. Lucky for us there aren't others listening in to the truth!"

As he spoke he noticed that the boat was slowly moving away from the mole; but they were making no headway worth mentioning, and they had to clear some fishing-smacks moored off the jetty before they gained open water. There was nothing for it but to hoist the mizzen, and as he did so, he gave the tiller a kick with a foot to clear the end of the jetty, while Broome stood by, anxious to help, but not knowing in the least what to do. And it was then, when they were not fifty yards from the quay that the alarm was given.

That came as a sudden surprise that was far from welcome. For once in his life Captain MacAndrew had counted his chickens before they were hatched, though he had never really believed in his heart that they could get clear of the place without being detected. Such familiar sounds as the rattling of an anchor chain and the uneven jerky grating on the stays as the sails were hoisted, breaking the silence of the night in the little sheltered bay, had awakened from his slumbers at least one of the fishermen.

The man may have seen the slowly moving yacht from a window. At any rate, he suddenly appeared on the quay, failed to see any sign of the sentry who he knew ought to be there, and at once hailed the boat.

Receiving no answer, as Broome had none ready and the captain no German, he therefore shouted at the top of his voice. The yacht was obviously being stolen by someone who had no right to her; it was war-time; the sentry had disappeared; no one had answered his challenge—and that was enough for him. And it was more than enough for the two fugitives on board, for the fellow on the quay had a voice like a calving cow. It rose in the still night air like a siren; it rolled away over the water like some sort of vocal tidal wave; it echoed and re-echoed up and along the village street, to reach the ears of the sentries in the fort. If that voice warned the whole bay that mischief was afoot, it also warned MacAndrew and the American that the fat was in the fire.

With a jump like a mountain goat, the captain sprang to the foot of the main-mast. Not one man in a thousand would have been able to hoist that sail single-

handed, but MacAndrew managed it, and he did the job in next to no time. Caution had now gone to the winds that were anywhere, except within that dark and sheltered harbor.

SHE was now under all the sail she could carry, saving only the jib. The canvas bellied in the off-shore wind, and although the wash of the setting tide fretted and rippled under her bows, she was slowly making headway, when MacAndrew ordered Broome to take hold of the tiller, as there was careful steering to be done before they could clear the end of the mole. Not only was there the jetty to starboard, but several craft lay anchored off-shore.

"Down tiller!" MacAndrew roared.

And Walter Broome, not having the least idea what that meant, put the helm hard a-port.

"The other way, ye damned fool!" The skipper literally danced upon the deck. "Hoots, man, an apprentice cook's mate in a dago tanker would know better'n that! Am I putting to sea wi' a tailor's dummy or what?"

He seemed to have forgotten, in the excitement of the moment, that but a few minutes ago Walter Broome had been a heaven-sent genius, and a lot else. But he knew that it would be touch-and-go now whether they got safely away or not, and he may be excused if his "hieland" blood was a trifle roused. Inwardly he thanked his stars that they had put the motorboat out of action; for the man on the quay, who had been joined by several others, had by now discovered the sentry, gagged and bound under the thwarts of MacAndrew's floating taxi-cab.

"So far as I'm aware," he shouted to Broome, "there's naught but sail in the harbor. For all that, I'm no disposed to enter for a yacht race. D'ye think ye can start that box o' combustion tricks that goes by the name of an engine?"

"Sure," Broome promptly answered—for he was a motorist, if he was no sailor. "There's oil here, but no gasoline, so far as I can see."

"Ye'll find that for'ard, in the fo'c's'le, all you'll want. Step lively, lad, and step on it, too, when once you get her started. They'll be alongside in row-boats in two shakes. I'll mind the helm."

What he had said was no more than the truth. There were at least six men now on the quay, and they could hear others running toward them, probably men from the fort. And then, like a sword-thrust in the darkness, a searchlight shot out from the hill-top, swept the harbor like a broom—and then fixed the yacht.

WALTER BROOME had now work to do that he understood, but he had not time enough to do it. He had to find one of the five-liter cans of fuel in the forecastle, carry it aft along the deck, fill the tank, and then crank and start an engine that he had never seen before in his life. And by the time he had done all that it would have been all up with them, had it not been for MacAndrew.

There were armed and shouting men upon the mole, and others at the end of the jetty. Shots were fired, for no doubt by now the released sentry had told his story. He could not, of course, explain who had attacked him, or where they had come from; but the enemy were upon them, and for aught they knew a British squadron lay in the offing.

MacAndrew on deck lay flat on his face to let the bullets fly over him, while at the same time he kept a sharp look-out on either side. A boat had put out from the end of the wooden jetty. He could see at least three armed men in the stern, as well as jets of fire at muzzles of their rifles whenever they fired. The men on the forward thwarts were rowing desperately, putting all their weight into it—and what was more they were overhauling the yacht. The wind was not enough and the tide was running strong. MacAndrew knew that sooner or later he would have to face a boarding

party single-handed—and that wasn't a job he relished.

Anxiously he waited—waited for Walter Broome to get the engine started. Every second they were being overhauled. He had no more power over the wind than the tide.

After all there was something to be said for the old days of galley-slaves. Man could be master of man, but never of the elements. He noticed that there were five men in the approaching boat, two fishermen rowers and three armed soldiers—probably the relief for the little fat sentry they had treated with such scant courtesy. It certainly looked as if he was going to have his work cut out.

Picking up the coils of the hawser that had been left lying anyhow on the counter-board when they had cleared the mole, he threw it into the water. Then he took up the rifle that had belonged to the sentry they had overpowered. This was war—he knew that. War in which a single human life meant next to nothing; yet, somehow or other he couldn't find it within him to shoot one of those rowing fishermen in the back. They weren't armed; they were sons of the sea, as he was, and they were only doing their job.

ONE of the soldiers—yes. No reason why he should hesitate about that, especially as they were doing their best to kill him, though their shooting was uncommonly bad, the bullets flying high—but that may have been due to the rock and sway of the boat. But, try as he might, he could not draw a bead on one of the men in the stern, since they were masked and covered by the rowers. The pursuing boat was now so close astern that he could almost have spat on board. In a few seconds it would have to come to a fight.

The Germans were all shouting excitedly, no doubt calling upon him to surrender. But MacAndrew understood not a word—and it wouldn't have made any difference to him, if he had. He had already decided upon what seemed to him the only thing to do.

The prow of the boat was now under the counter. One of the rowers had thrown the top half of his body on to the deck, when MacAndrew, who had sprung to his feet, gave him a kick in the face that sent him back, sagging over the gunwhales like a half empty sack. And a second later MacAndrew himself had jumped into the boat.

He held the rifle in his left hand. His right fist was clenched, and with this he caught the man who faced him a swinging blow that tumbled him backward into the stern, with his feet sticking up over one of the thwarts like those of a sawdust doll.

One would never have imagined from his build that he could be so agile in his movements, so quick upon his feet. In a few seconds he had boarded the boat and accounted for the two rowers—they were out of action for the time being, and that was all he cared about. Clubbing his rifle he now threatened the two soldiers who confronted him, while the third man behind them was throwing his weight from one side to the other, doing his best to prevent the boat turning turtle—indeed, it was rocking and swaying to such an extent that it might capsize at any moment.

Both soldiers—men in middle age, like the one they had captured on the mole—raised their rifles on guard, to ward off the blow they expected and most obviously feared. But that blow never came; for the butt of the rifle, with all the strength of the sturdy skipper's arms — went clean through the bottom of the boat. Nor was he content with that; for another blow, delivered with a downward stab, stove her in completely, with the result that almost at once they were ankle-deep in water.

But not so MacAndrew. He knew that in less than a minute they would wet more than their feet. They would either have to swim back to the mole—or, if they couldn't swim, they must be saved by their

friends or drown. As for himself, he was overboard in a trice. Jumping from the gunwhale, he grasped the stern hawser that he had purposely thrown into the water; and hauling himself along this, soon reached the yacht that had drawn a few yards ahead.

With the water dripping from off him, he shook himself like a wet dog, sending the spray like fire-flies in the strong beam of the searchlight. Looking astern he saw the boat sink, the men struggling and swearing in the water—and then suddenly, after a missfire and a splutter from the exhaust pipe, came the *chug-chug* of an engine. Broome had at last finished his job; the screw was churning up the water, and the ketch under her own power was rounding the end of the mole.

WHEN Broome shoved his head above the level of the deck, MacAndrew was seated at the tiller. His unshaven face, shining with water that dripped from the ends of his mustache, looked at once ludicrous and frightening in the strong light of the searchlight. Yet one could see he was content. He had done all he had ever hoped to do—and he had got away with it. Whatever lay in store for them he was prepared to accept as his fate. He knew they were not out of danger yet. The searchlight still held them, giving them a feeling of impotence—something they could never hope to elude.

Minutes passed, and nothing happened. They were now well clear of the harbor, heading out to sea. Leaving Broome at the helm, MacAndrew had gone for'ard and hoisted the jib. Either the wind had increased, or they got the full benefit of it now that they were some distance from the shore; but they were making better headway than the skipper had ever expected, when the first shot was fired.

It fell short, the shell plunging into the sea, a good two hundred yards astern. It would take the gunners some time to find the range; and in the meantime the yacht, running before the wind, was drawing farther and farther away. Under all the canvas she could carry, she was scudding through the waves, the engine running smoothly.

Walter S. Broome had already seen as much of the war as he wanted; but, so long as he lived, he was never likely to forget the experience of the next twenty minutes.

There was more than one gun in action now, and the report of each came to them almost simultaneously with the shell. Fountains of water shot up on either side of the flying ketch, often falling within twenty yards of them and drenching them to the skin. However, being not eleven feet in the beam, and heading dead away from the island, she was not an easy target to hit.

A direct hit would have sent her to the bottom in two seconds, but the odds were a hundred to one against it.

Finally, exasperated at their ill-success, the German gunners did what they ought to have done in the first place: they opened up with shrapnel. They were lengthening their range as the yacht drew away from them; and though the beam of the searchlight was nothing like as strong as it had been, they made pretty accurate shooting. Shells burst at various altitudes ahead of them and astern, though more often abeam. If they had the elevation right, their aim was faulty—otherwise Walter Broome and the skipper would never have lived to tell the tale, and as it was more than once they came within an ace of losing their lives.

For time and again shrapnel bullets rent the canvas, knocked splinters from the mast, or ripped grooves in the deck. MacAndrew would steer on a zig-zag course for a while and then run straight before the wind; but he knew as well as the men behind the guns that it was all a matter of luck.

And as they got farther and father out to sea their hopes of ultimate es-

cape increased, until it was better than an even chance that they would get away with their lives. In the first place, they had run into a thin sea mist in which the much fainter beam of the searchlight was disseminated like the light from a cloudy moon; and secondly, they were now under long range fire, and the shots were flying wide. And it was not until both felt with growing conviction that they were already as good as safe that MacAndrew spoke for the first time.

Before he did so, he took in a deep breath.

"We've run the gauntlet, lad, and it seems we've got away with it. When you come to look at it, luck was with us from the start. Did I not tell ye, the ways and means o' Divine Providence are inscrutable and strange? Looks as if this craft were lying up there specially for us, same as the grocer, even the toy bucket we found on the beach; but, I reckon, the most merciful dispensation o' all were that crate o' ducks. All the same, don't run away with the notion that we're through with the business. There's mines everywhere. It will be dawn in about five hours; we're still in German waters, and we're more likely to be sighted by enemy ships than one of our own or a neutral. Still there, once again, we got to take our chance."

"What course are we on?" Broome asked.

"Due east or thereabout. If the wind holds, and the engine don't peg out, we ought to be past the Bight o' Helgoland afore sunrise. For the present, we can't do better than make fast the tiller and go below for a feed. After that we can take watch and watch."

SELDOM can two men have enjoyed a meal more. They did more than ample justice to every can they opened. Though all the viands were cold, it was what MacAndrew called a banquet, and in bottled lager beer they drank to the health of Herr Schmidt, the leading grocer and provision merchant in the island of which they never learned the name.

Dawn found them in a fog-girt sea, where there was not a sail nor smoke-stack in sight. The wind had veered somewhat to the north, with the result that MacAndrew, changing his course to the southward, began to have hopes of being able to reach one of the Dutch ports the following day. But that was not to be. The wind rose as the day passed, and though they shortened sail, they had a rough time of it, Walter S. Broome passing out completely. In the gale on the *Vaala* he had felt far from comfortable; but now, as he lay on the owner's comfortable bunk, white in the face and shivering with the cold, he began to wonder whether the life he had preserved throughout a series of miracles was really worth the living, and the only occasion on which he came on deck was to deliver Herr Schmidt's comestibles to the North Sea herring and cod. There was no question now of sharing the watches; and this was not so much commiseration on MacAndrew's part as his shrewd Scottish common-sense. Tired out as he was, he preferred to entrust their destinies to the weather eye of a weary seaman rather than a land lubber.

As the whole of their adventure had been throughout a series of providential happenings, not easy to explain, so were they found by the merest chance when the odds were all against it. For somewhere about the sixth longitude they were near as a touch run down by a British destroyer that took them on board and towed the ketch as a prize into Harwich.

And all MacAndrew remarked, as he stepped ashore on English soil, was that the ways of Providence are strange. He regretted that he would never now have the opportunity of showing his American friend round the princely city of Edinburgh—but, after all, they had no cause to complain. They were both alive, when they never should be, and when better men than they had gone to their deaths.

The First Hopalong Cassidy Short Story Which Appeared in This Magazine—

HOPALONG SITS IN

By CLARENCE E. MULFORD

HOPALONG CASSIDY dismounted in front of the rough-boarded hotel, regarding it with a curious detachment which was the result of a lifetime's experience with such hybrid affairs. He knew what it would be even before he left the saddle; saloon, gambling house and hotel, to mention its characteristics in the order of their real importance.

Hopalong entered the main room and found that it ran the full length of the building. A bar paralleled one wall, card tables filled the open space; and in the inside corner near the door was a pine desk on which was a bottle of muddy ink, a corroded pen, a paper covered notebook of the kind used in schools for compositions, and a grimy showcase holding cigars and tobaccos. Behind the desk on the wall was a short piece of board with nails driven in it, and on the nails hung a few keys.

A shiftless person with tobacco stained lips arose from a near-by-table, looking inquiringly at the newcomer.

"Got a room?" asked Hopalong.

"Yeah. Two dollars, in advance," replied the clerk.

"By the week," suggested Hopalong.

"Twelve dollars—we don't count Sundays," said the clerk with a foolish grin.

"Eat on the premises?" asked the newcomer, sliding a gold coin across the desk.

The clerk tossed the coin into the air, listened to the ring as it struck the board, tossed it into a draw, made change and hooked a thumb over his shoulder.

"Right in yonder," he said, indicating the other half of the building. "Doors open six to eight; twelve to one; six to seven. Pay when you eat an' take what you get. Come with me an' I'll show you the room."

Hopalong obeyed, climbing the steep and economical stairs with just the faintest suggestion of a limp. As they passed down the central hall, he could see into the rooms on each side. They were all alike, even to the arrangement of the furniture. The beds all stood with their heads against the hall wall, in the same relative positions.

"Reckon this will do," he grunted, looking past the clerk into the room indicated. "Stable out back?"

"Yeah. Take yore hoss around an' talk to the stableman," said the clerk, facing around. "Dinner in about an hour."

Hopalong nodded and fell in behind his guide, found the stairs worse in descent than in ascent, and arranged for the care of his horse. When he returned to the room he dropped his blanket roll on the foot of the bed, and then looked searchingly and slowly at the canvas walls. There was nothing to be seen, and, shaking his head gently, he went out and down again to wander about the town until time to enter the dining-room.

AFTER dinner he saddled his horse and rode down the wide cattle trail, going southward in hope of meeting the SV herd. This was the day it was due; but he was too old a hand to worry about a

trail herd being behind time. Johnny Nelson would reach the town when he got there, and there was no reason to waste any thought about the matter. Still, he had nothing else to do, and he pushed on at an easy lope.

He, himself, had been over at Dodge City, where he had learned that Johnny Nelson had a herd on the trail and was bound north. It was a small herd of selected cattle driven by a small outfit. He had not seen Johnny for over a year, and it was too good an opportunity to let pass. For the pleasure of meeting his old friend he had written a letter to him addressed to an important mail station on the new trail, where all outfits called for mail. Some days later he had left Dodge and ridden west, and now he was on hand to welcome the SV owner.

Hopalong passed two herds as he rode, and paused to exchange words with the trail bosses. One of the herds was bound for Wyoming, and the other for Dakota. Trailing had not been very brisk so far this season, but from what the two bosses had heard it was due to pick up shortly. About mid-afternoon Hopalong turned and started back toward town, reaching the hotel soon after the dining-room doors opened.

After supper the town came to life, and as darkness fell, the street was pretty well filled with men. The greater part of the town's population was floating; punchers, gamblers and others, whose occupations were not so well known.

The main room of the hotel came to life swiftly, the long bar was well lined and the small tables began to fill. The noise increased in volume and it was not long before the place was in full swing. From time to time brawls broke out in the street and made themselves heard; and once pistol shots caused heads to raise and partly stilled the room.

Hopalong sat lazily in a chair between two windows, his back to the wall, placidly engaged in watching the activities about him. More and more his eyes turned to one particular table, where a game of poker was under way, and where the rounds of drinks came in a steady procession. His curiosity was aroused, and he wondered if the situation was the old one.

To find out, he watched to see which player drank the least liquor, and he found that instead of one man doing that, there were two. To a man of Hopalong's experience along the old frontier, that suggested a very pertinent thought; and he watched more keenly now to see if he could justify it. So far as he was concerned it was purely an impersonal matter; he knew none of the players and cared nothing who lost in the game. As hand followed hand, and the liquor began to work, the cheating became apparent to him and threatened to become apparent to others; and he found his gorge slowly rising.

Finally one of the players, having lost his last chip and being unable to buy more, pushed back his chair and left the table, reeling toward the street door. Just then, elbowing his way from the crowd at the bar, came one of the trail bosses with whom Hopalong had talked that afternoon. The newcomer stopped behind the vacant chair and gestured toward it inquiringly.

"Shore. Set down," said one of the sober players. The others nodded their acquiescence, soberly or drunkenly as the case might be, and more drinks were ordered. The two sober men had drunk round for round with the others, and yet showed no effects from it. Hopalong flashed a glance at the bar, and nodded wisely. Very likely they were being served tea.

HOPALONG pulled his chair out from the wall, tipped it back and settled down, his big hat slanting well before his eyes. He had ridden all day and was tired, and he found himself drowsing. After an interval, the length of which he

did not know, he was aroused to alertness by a shouted curse; but before he could get to his feet or roll off the chair, a shot roared out, almost deafening him. There was a quick flurry at the table, a struggle, and he saw the trail boss, disarmed, being dragged and pushed toward the door. Hopalong removed his sombrero and looked at the hole near the edge of the brim. He was inserting the tip of his little finger into it when one of the players in a hurried glance around the room, saw the action.

"Close, huh?" inquired the gambler with momentary interest, and then looked around the room again. Several men had pushed out from the crowd and stood waiting in a little group, closely watching the room. As he glimpsed these men, the gambler's face lost its trace of anxiety and he smiled coldly.

Hopalong's eyes flicked from the gambler to the watchful guards and back again, and then he turned slowly to look at the wall behind him, just back of his right ear. The bullet hole was there.

"Yeah, it was close," he said slowly, grinning grimly. "At first I reckoned mebby it might be an old one; but that hole in the wall says it ain't. Who stepped on that fool's pet corn?"

"Nobody; just too much liquor," answered the gambler. "Sometimes it makes a man ugly. Now he's busted up the game, for I shore don't care for a four-hander. Mebby you'd like to take his place?"

"I might," admitted Hopalong with no especial interest. "What you playin', an' how steep?"

"Draw, with jackpots after a fullhouse or better," replied the gambler, looking swiftly but appraisingly at the two drunken players. They had leaned over the table again, and were not to be counted upon to make denials of any statement. "Two bits, an' two dollars; just a friendly game, to pass away the time."

"All right," replied Hopalong, thinking that friendship came rather high in Trailville, if that was the measure of a friendly game.

The gambler waved a hand, and four men stepped to the table. After a moment's argument they took the helpless players from their chairs and started them toward the front door.

Hopalong smiled, thinking that now the game was less than four-handed. He said nothing, however, but stepped forward and dropped into one of the vacant chairs.

"We can get a couple more to take their places," Hopalong said, and nodded gently as his prophecy was fulfilled. He smiled a welcome to the two men and waited until the gambler had taken his own chair. Then Hopalong leaned forward. "You can call me Riordan," he said.

"Kitty out a white chip every game for the house," said the gambler, reaching for the cards. "We play straights between threes and flushes; no fancy combinations. A faced card on the draw can't be taken."

"You playin' for the house?" asked Hopalong needlessly. He was drawing a hand from a pocket as he spoke, and at the gambler's answering nod, he opened the hand and pushed the coins toward the other. "You got chips enough to sell me some," he said.

THE game got under way, and the liquor began to arrive. Hopalong was smiling inwardly: he was well fortified to meet the conditions of this game. In the first place, he could stand an amazing amount of whiskey; but he did not intend to crowd his capacity by drinking every round. In the second, poker was to him a fine art; and the more dishonest the game, the finer his art—thanks to Tex Ewalt. He always met crookedness with crookedness rather than to cause trouble, but he let the others set the pace.

He looked like a common frontier citizen, with perhaps a month's wages in his pockets, and he believed that was the reason for the moderate limit set by the gambler, who was a tinhorn, and satisfied with small pickings if he could not do better; but as a matter of fact, Hopalong was a full partner in a very prosperous northern ranch, and he could write a check for six figures and have it honored. Last and fully as important, he was able to take care of himself in any frontier situation from cutting cards to shooting lead. He believed that he was going to thoroughly enjoy his stay in Trailville.

"On the trail?" carelessly asked the gambler as the cards were cut for the first deal. "No," answered Hopalong, picking up the deck by diagonal corners in case the cards had been shaved. "I'm just driftin' toward home."

As the game went on it appeared that he had a bad poker weakness; every time he had a poor hand and bluffed strongly, his mouth twitched. It took some time for this to register with the others, but when it did, he found that he was very promptly called; and his displeasure in his adversaries' second sight was plain to all who watched.

Along about the middle of the game his mouth must have twitched by accident, for he raked in a pot that had been well built up and leveled up nearly all his loss. The game seesawed until midnight, when it broke up; and Hopalong found that he cashed in twenty dollars less chips than he had bought; twenty dollars' worth of seeds, from which a crop might grow. He knew that he would be a welcomed addition to any poker game in this hotel, that his weaknesses were known, and his consistent and set playing was now no secret.

He went to his room, closed the door and lighted the lamp, intending to go to bed; but the room was too hot for comfort. There was not a breath of air stirring, and as yet the coolness of the night had not overcome the heat stored up by the walls and roof during the day. He stood for a moment in indecision and then, knowing that another hour would make an appreciable difference in the temperature of the room, he turned and left it, going down to the street.

The night was dark, but starbright, and he stood for a moment looking about him. The saloons and gambling shacks were going full blast, but they had no appeal for him. He walked toward the corner of the hotel and looked back toward the stables; and then he remembered that he had seen a box against the side wall of the barroom. That was just what he wanted, and he moved slowly along the wall, feeling has way in the deeper shadow, found it, and seated himself with a sigh of relief, leaning back against the wall and relaxing.

Men passed up and down the street, and human voices rose and fell in the buildings along it. Time passed with no attempt on Hopalong's part to keep track of it, but by the deepening chill which comes at that altitude, he believed that the room would now be bearable. About to get up and make a start for the street, he heard and saw two men lazily approach the corner of the building and lean against it, and glance swiftly about them. From the faint light of the front window he thought that he knew who one of them was; and as soon as the man spoke, he was certain of the identity.

"You know what to do," said the speaker. "I looked 'em over good. There's about two hundred head of fine, selected cattle, four-year-olds. It'll be easy to run off most of 'em, or mebby all of 'em. Take 'em round about into Wolf Hollow, an' then scatter 'em to hell an' gone. We'll round 'em up later. Don't bungle it this time. Get goin'."

The two men separated, one moving swiftly to where a horse was standing across the street. He mounted quickly and rode away. The other moved out of sight around the corner and disappeared, apparently into the hotel. Three men came past

the corner and paused to argue drunkenly; and by the time they had moved on again Hopalong knew that he had lost touch with the man who held his interest.

The coast being clear, Hopalong moved slowly toward the street, went into the barroom and glanced about as he made his way to the stairs. Reaching his room, he closed the door behind him and listened for a few moments. During lulls in the general noise downstairs he could hear a man snoring.

UNDRESSING, he stretched out and gave himself over to a period of quiet but intensive thought. He had nothing positive to go upon; the horseman had ridden off so quickly that he was gone before Hopalong could come to any decision about following him; he realized that by the time he could have saddled up, the man would have been out of reach. He did not know for sure that the two men had referred to the SV herd, nor where to find it if he did know. All he could do was to wait, and to keep his ears open and his wits about him. It would be better to conceal his interest in Johnny Nelson and Johnny's cattle.

As a matter of fact, he had nothing but unfounded suspicions for the whole structure he was building up.

Back in Dodge City he had been well informed about Trailville and the conditions obtaining there, since a large percent of the unholy population of Dodge had packed up and gone to the new town. The big herds no longer crossed the Arkansas near the famous old cattle town, to amble up the divide leading to the Sawlog. The present marshal of Dodge was a good friend of Hopalong's, and had been thorough in his pointers and remarks.

Hopalong had learned from him, for one thing, that a good trail herd with a small outfit would be likely to lose cattle and have a deal of trouble before it passed the new town; especially if the trail crew was further reduced in numbers of some of the men receiving time off to enjoy an evening in the town. Further than that, the marshal had mentioned one man by name, Bradley, and stressed it emphatically; and only tonight Hopalong had heard that man's name called out when the poker game was under way, and had looked with assumed carelessness across the table at the player who had answered to it.

Hopalong had taken pains during the remainder of the evening to be affable to this gentleman, and to study him; he had been so affable and friendly that he even had forbode giving a hint that he knew the gentleman cheated when occasion seemed to warrant it. And this man Bradley was the man he had overheard speak just a few minutes before at the corner of the building.

Perhaps, after all, he would ride down the trail in the morning, if he knew that he was not observed doing it, and try to get in touch with Johnny, even though he did not know how far away the S V herd might be. He knew that the herd numbered about two hundred head of the best cattle to be found on four ranches; and he knew that the outfit would be small. He feared—ah, hell! What was the use of letting unfounded suspicions make a fool of him, and keep him awake? He turned over on his side and went to sleep like a child.

He was the second man through the dining-room the next morning, and soon thereafter he left town, bound down the trail, hoping that the S V herd was within a day's ride, and that he could meet it unobserved. He had not covered a dozen miles before he saw a horseman coming toward him up the trail, and something about the man seemed to be familiar. It was not long before he knew the rider to be Bradley.

The two horsemen nodded casually and pulled up, stopping almost leg to leg.

"Leavin' us, Riordan?" asked the upbound man.

"No," answered Hopalong. "The town's

dead durin' daylight, and I figgered to look over the country an' kill some time."

"There ain't nothin' down this way to see," replied the other. "Nor up the other way neither," he added.

"Ride with you, then, as far as town," said Hopalong, deciding not to show even a single card of his hand.

They went up on the trail at a slow and easy gait, talking idly of this and that, and then Hopalong turned sidewise and asked a question, endeavoring to conceal an interest which he really did not have.

"Who's town marshal, Bradley?" he asked.

"Slick Cunningham. Why?" asked Bradley, flashing a quick glance at his companion.

Hopalong was silent for a moment, turning the name over in his mind, and then his expression faintly suggested relief.

"Never heard of him," he admitted, and laughed gently, his careless good nature once more restored. "Reckon, accordin' to that, he never heard of me, neither."

"Oh, Slick's all right; he minds his own business purty well," said Bradley, and grinned broadly. "Anyhow, he's out of town right now."

Continuing a purely idle conversation, they soon saw the town off on one side of the trail, and Bradley raised a hand.

"There she is," he said, pulling up. "I've got a couple of errands to do that wouldn't interest you none; so I'll quit you here, an' see you in town tonight."

"Keno," grunted Hopalong, and headed for the collection of shacks that was Trailville. He was halfway to town when he purposely lost his hat. Wheeling, he swung down to scoop it up, and took advantage of the movement to glance swiftly backward; and he was just in time to see Bradley dipping down into a hollow west of the trail. The remainder of the short ride was covered at a walk, and was a thoughtful one.

The day dragged past, supper time came and went, and again the big room slowly filled with men. Hopalong sat in the same chair, tipped back against the wall, the bullet hole close to his head. Bradley soon came in, stopping at the bar for a few moments, and then led the same group of card players to the same table. Looking around for Hopalong, they espied him, called him by his new name of Riordan and gestured toward the table. In a few moments the game was under way.

THE crowd shifted constantly, men coming and going from and to the street. There was a group bunched at the bar, close to the front door. Two men came in from the street, pushing along the far side of the group eager to quench their thirst. One of them was Slick Cunningham, town marshal, just back from a special assignment. His name was not even as old as Trailville. He glanced through a small opening in the group to see who was in the room, and as his gaze settled on the man playing cards with Bradley, he stiffened and stepped quickly backward, covered by the group.

"Outside, George," he whispered to his companion. "Pronto! Stand just outside the door an' wait for me!"

George was mildly surprised, but he turned and sauntered to the street, stopping when he reached it.

The marshal was nowhere in sight, but he soon appeared around the corner of the building, and beckoned his friend to his side.

"I just had a good look through the window," he said hurriedly. "I knowed it was him, an' it shore is! When Bradley said he was figgerin' on takin' his pick of that S V herd I told him, an' told all you, too, that he was gettin' ready to pull a grizzly's tail. An' he is! Nelson was one of the old Bar 20 gang. . . . An' who the hell do you reckon is sittin' between Bradley an' Winters, playin' poker with 'em?" Hopalong Cassidy! Hopalong Cassidy, damn his soul!"

Thought you said he was up in Mon-

tanny?" replied George, with only casual interest.

"He was! But, great Gawd! he don't have to stay there, does he? You get word to Bradley, quick as you can. Settin' elbow to elbow with Cassidy! If that don't stink, then I don't know what does! Cassidy here in Trailville, an' Nelson's cattle comin' up the trail! I'm tellin' you that somethin's wrong!"

"You reckon he knows anything?" asked George, to whom the name of Hopalong Cassidy did not mean nearly so much as it did to his companion.

"Listen!" retorted the marshal earnestly. "Nobody on Gawd's gray earth knows how much that feller knows! "I've never run up ag'in him yet when he didn't know a damn sight more than I wanted him to; and what he don't know, he damn soon finds out. You get word to Bradley. I'm pullin' out of town, an' I'm stayin' out 'til this mess is all cleaned up. If Cassidy sees me, he'll know that I know him, an' if he knows that I know him, he'll know that I'll pass on the word to my friends. I'll give a hundred dollars to see him buried."

"You mean that?" asked George, with sudden interest.

Slick peered into his eyes through the gloom, and then snorted with disgust.

"Don't you be too damn fool!" he snapped. "I didn't say that I wanted to see you buried, did I?"

"Hell with that!" retorted George. "I'm askin' you if you really mean that as an offer; if you'll pay a hundred dollars to the man that kills him?"

"Well, I didn't reckon nobody would be fool enough to take me up," said Slick, but he suddenly leaned forward again, as a new phase of the matter struck him. "Yes, you damn fool! Yes, I will!" He pulled his hat down firmly and nodded. "My share of the herd money will come to a lot more than a hundred dollars; but if that pizen pup stays alive around here we won't steal a head, an' I won't get a cent. Yes, the offer goes; but you better get help, an' split it three ways. There's only one man in town who would have any kind of a chance, an' his name ain't George."

"I'll take care of that end of it," replied George; "an' now I'm goin' in to get word to Bradley. So long."

"So long," said Slick, and forthwith disappeared around the corner on his way to the little corral behind the marshal's office. There was a good horse in that corral, and a horse was just what he wanted at the moment.

GEORGE pushed through the group, signaled to the bartender, ordered a drink, and whispered across the counter. Placing his glass on the bar, George moved carelessly down the room, nodding to right and to left. He stopped beside the busy poker table, grunted a greeting to the men he knew, and dragged up a chair near Bradley's right elbow, where he could look at the cards in his friend's hand, and by merely raising his eyes, looked over their tops at the player on the left.

Hopalong had dropped out for that deal, and was leaning back in his chair, his eyes shaded by the brim of his hat. His placid gaze was fixed on the window opposite and he was wondering whose face it was that he had glimpsed in the little patch of light outside. The face had been well back, and the beams of light from the lamps had not

revealed it well; but it was something to think about, and, having nothing else to do at the moment, he let his mind dwell on it. He did not like faces furtively peering in through lighted windows.

Bradley chuckled, pulled in the pot and tossed his cards unshown into the discard.

"Hello, George," he said, turning to smile at the man to his right.

"Hello, Bill. Won't nobody call yore hand tonight?"

"They don't call me at the right time," laughed Bradley, in rare good humor. "This seems to be my night." He looked up at the man who now stepped into his circle of vision. "What is it, Tom?"

"Bartender wants to see you, Bill. Says it's important, an' won't take more'n a minute."

"Deal me out this hand," said Bradley, pushing back his chair and following the messenger.

Hopalong let the cards lay as they fell, and when the fifth had dropped in front of him his fingers pushed them into a neat, smooth-sided book, and he watched the faces of the other players as the hands were picked up. The house gambler was in direct line with that part of the bar where Bradley had stopped, and Hopalong's gaze, lifting from the face of the player, for a moment picked out Bradley and the bartender. The latter was looking straight at him and the expression on the man's face was grim and hostile. Hopalong looked at the next player, lifted his own cards and riffled the corners to let the pips flash before his eyes.

"She's open," said the man on the dealer's left, tossing a chip into the center of the table.

"Stay," grunted Hopalong, doing likewise in his turn. A furtive face at the window, a message for Bradley, and a suddenly hostile bartender—and Johnny's herd was small, selected, and had a small outfit with it. Suspicions, suspicions, always suspicions! He bent his head, and then raised it quickly and looked at George before that person had time to iron out his countenance.

From that instant Hopalong did not like George, and determined to keep an eye on him.

Bradley returned, slapped George on the shoulder and drew up to the table, watching the play. Not once did he look at Hopalong.

When the play came around to Hopalong it had been raised twice, and that person, studying his cards intently, suddenly looked over their tops and tossed them away. Bradley's expression changed a flash too late.

"They ain't runnin' for me," growled Hopalong, glancing from Bradley to George. "Game's gettin' tiresome, but I'll try a few more hands."

"Hell!" growled Bradley, affable and smiling again. "That ain't the trouble—the game's too small to hold a feller's interest."

"Right!" quickly said the house gambler, nodding emphatically as he sensed a kill. "Too tee-totally damn small! Let's play a round of jackpots to finish this up; an' then them that don't want to play for real money can't say they was throwed out cold."

"I'll set out the round of jacks an' come in on the new game," said Hopalong, risking quick glances around the room. No one seemed to be paying any particular attention to him.

"Me, too. No, I'll give you fellers a chance," said Bradley.

"Don't need to give me no chance," said a player across from him. "I'm ready for the big game."

HOPALONG saw a young man push through the crowd near the door and head straight for the table. As he made his way down the room he was the cynosure of all eyes, and a ripple of whispered comment followed him. Hopalong did not know it, but the newcomer was a killer famous for his deeds around Trailville—a man who would kill for money, who had always "got" his man, and who was a close friend of Bradley's.

"Hello, Bill," the newcomer addressed Bradley, and then dropped into the chair which George surrendered to him as if he was expected to do so; and thereupon

George moved toward the bar and was lost to sight.

Bradley nodded, smiled and faced the table again, gesturing with both hands.

"Riordan, meet Jim Hawes. Jim, Riordan's a stranger here."

THE men exchanged nods, sizing each other up. Hawes saw a typical cowpuncher, past middle age; but a man whose deeds range from one edge of the cattle country to the other; a man whose reputation would greatly enhance that of anybody who managed to kill him with a gun in an even break. His mantle of fame would rest automatically upon the shoulders of his master.

Hopalong saw a vicious faced killer, cold, unemotional, and of almost tender years. There was a swagger in his every movement and one could easily see that he was an important individual. The young man's eyes were rather close together, and his chin receded. To Hopalong, both of these characteristics were danger marks. He had found, in his own experience, that the prognathous jaw is greatly overrated. Hawes reminded him of a weasel.

"Haven't had a game for a long time," said Hawes, speaking with almost pugnacious assurance. "Reckon I'll set in an' give her a whirl."

"She's goin' to be a real one, Jim," said the house dealer uneasily. His profession, to his way of thinking, called for a little trickery with the cards upon occasion; but with Jim Hawes in the game only an adept would dare attempt it; not so much that Hawes was capable of detecting fine work, but because he would shoot with as little compunction as a rattler strikes.

"I like 'em big; the bigger the better," boasted Hawes, his cold eyes on Hopalong. "What you say, Riordan?" he asked, and the way he said the words made them a challenge. It appeared that his humor was not a pleasant one tonight.

"I'd rather have 'em growed up," replied Hopalong, looking him in the eyes.

"Well growed up," amended Hopalong, his gaze unswerving.

Somewhere in the room a snicker sounded, quickly hushed as Hawes glanced toward the sound. The room had grown considerably quieter, ears functioning instead of tongues, and this, in itself, was a hint to an observing man. Hawes' gaze was back again like a flash, and he kept it set on the stranger's face while he slowly, with his left hand, drew his chair closer to the table, in the space provided for him by Bradley. He, too, sensed the quiet of the room, and a tight, knowing smile wreathed his thin lips.

"We'll make it growed up enough for you, Mister Riordan," he said, his left hand now drawing a roll of bills from a pocket. "How's five, an' twenty?" he challenged.

"Cents or dollars," curiously asked Hopalong, his face expressionless.

Hawes flushed, but checked the fighting words before they reached his teeth.

"What makes you reckon it might be cents?" he demanded, triumphantly.

"Just had a feelin' that it might be," calmly answered Hopalong. "Either one is a waste of time."

Bradley raised his eyebrows, regarding the speaker intently.

"Yeah?" he softly inquired. "How do you grade a growed-up game?"

"It all depends who I'm playin' with," answered Hopalong, his eyes on Hawes' tense face.

"Five an' fifty—dollars!" snapped the youth, showing his teeth.

"She's improvin' with every word," chuckled the house player.

"Damn near of age, anyhow," said Hopalong, nodding. "Straight draw poker? Threes, straights, flushes, an' so forth? No fancy hands?"

"The same game we have been playin'," said the house player. "Jackpots after fullhouses, or better. That suit everybody?"

Silence gave consent, the chips were redeemed at the old figure, deftly stacked

and counted by the house player, and resold at the new prices. Hopalong drew out a roll of dirty bills, peeled off two of them, and with them bought a thousand dollars' worth of chips. He placed the remainder of the roll on the table near the chips, and nodded at it.

"When that's gone, I'm busted," he said, and looked at Hawes.

"Oh, don't worry! There's mine," sneered the youth, and bought the same amount of counters. Inwardly he thrilled; in so steep a game, cheating would be a great temptation to anyone inclined that way; and a crooked play would be justification for what followed it, and would suit him as well as any other excuse.

THE player who had announced that he was ready for the bigger game now raised both hands toward heaven, pushed back his chair, and motioned grandiloquently toward the table; but no one in the room cared to take his place; the game was far too steep for them, and they sensed a deadly atmosphere.

"Quittin' us, Frank?" asked Bradley, with a knowing grin.

"Cold an' positive! My money comes harder than your's, Bradley; an' I ain't got near as much of it. No, sir! I'll get all the excitement I'll need, just settin' back an' watchin' the play."

He had been sitting on Hopalong's left, and when he withdrew from the game, he pulled his chair back from the table, and now he drew it farther out of the way. Hopalong shifted in that direction, to even up the spacing; but as he stopped, he sensed Bradley's nearness, and saw that the latter had moved after him, but too far.

Bradley's impetus had carried him even closer to Hopalong than he had been before. Bradley smiled apologetically and moved back, but only for a few inches. The fleeting expression on Hawes' face revealed satisfaction, and dressed the blundering shift with intent. What intent? In Hopalong's mind there could be only one; and that one, deadly.

The game got under way, and it was different from the more or less innocent affair which had preceded it. It was different in more ways than one. In the first place there was now present a thinly veiled hospitality, an atmosphere of danger. In the second, a man could bluff with more assurance; a player would think twice before he would toss in fifty dollars to call a hand when he, himself, held little. In the third, a clever card manipulator would be tempted to make use of his best mastered tricks of sleight of hand; and should any man call for a new deck, or palm the old one for a moment, it would be well to give thought to the possible substitution of a cold deck. Here was the kind of a game Hopalong could enjoy; he had cut his teeth on them, and had been given excellent instruction by a past master of the game. Tex Ewalt had pronounced him proficient.

The first few hands were more in the nature of skirmishes, for with the change in the stakes had come a change in the style of play. Hopalong's fingers were calloused, but the backs of his fingers were not; and he now bunched his cards in his left hand, face to the palm, and let the backs of the fingers of his right hand brush gently down the involved patterns, searching for pin pricks. As the cards were dealt to him, Hopalong idly pushed them about on the table, to get a different slant of lamplight on each one. If the polish had been removed by abrasives or acids the reflected light would show it.

At last came a jackpot, and it was passed three times, growing greatly in the process. The house player picked up the cards to deal, shuffling them swiftly, and ruffled them together with both hands hiding them. He pushed the deck toward Hopalong for the cut, in such a manner that if the latter chose the easier and more natural movement, he would cut with his nearest, or left, hand. If he did this, his fingers

would naturally grasp the sides of the deck, and not the ends; and if the cards were trimmed, such a cut might well be costly.

As the dealer took his hand off the deck, Hopalong let his left hand reach for his cigarette; and it being thus occupied, and quite innocently so, he reached across his body with the idle right and quite naturally picked up the upper part of the deck by the ends. The dealer showed just the slightest indication of annoyance at this loss of time, and, finding Hopalong's bland gaze on the cards, forwent switching the cut, and dealt them as they lay.

Hawes opened for ten dollars. Bradley saw and raised it only five. Hopalong qualified. The dealer saw, and Hawes saw Bradley's raise, and boosted the limit. The others dropped out. Hawes showed his openers and took the pot. As the play went on, Hopalong observed a strange coincidence. The ante was five dollars; the limit, fifty. Every time that Hawes opened for ten dollars, and Bradley raised it five, the opener thereupon boosted the limit when his time came, and very often dropped out on the next round to let the other win. Here was team work: Hawes and Bradley vs. all.

Hopalong glanced inquiringly at the house player, and caught an almost imperceptible wink directed at himself. There was no need for these two men to go into conference where teamwork was concerned; they knew how to join forces without previous agreements. And now, team-work was called for as a matter of self-preservation.

THE play went on without much action, and Hawes picked up the cards, bunching them for the deal. He was not an expert, and a dozen men in the room saw the clumsy switch, and held their breaths; but nothing violent happened. Apparently the other three players had not seen anything of interest. Bradley opened for ten dollars. Hopalong, looking at his cards, saw three kings and a pair of tens. He passed, and smiled inwardly at the dealer's poorly concealed look of amazement. The house player saw, but when both Hawes and Bradley had raised the limit in turn, he threw his hand in the discard and watched Bradley take the pot by default.

Hopalong, toying idly with his cards, now looked at them again, and swore loudly and bitterly.

"Damn fool! I thought it was two pairs. . . . Will you look at that?"

Hopalong's outspread cards revealed their true worth, and the house player chuckled deep in his throat, his eyes beaming with congratulations.

"Pat king full, he said. "Well, Riordan, it can be beat."

"It can," admitted Hopalong, trying to smile. For an instant the two men looked understandingly into each other's eyes.

There was now no question about the status of this game. Both Hopalong and the house player had seen the clumsy switch; and it had been followed by a pat king full. The bars were now down and the rules were up. It was just a case of outcheating cheaters, and the devil take the less adept.

On Bradley's deal Hawes took another small pot by default, and Hopalong picked up the cards. His big hands moved swiftly, his fingers flicking almost in a blur of speed. The house player watched him, and then, curiously, against his habit, picked up each card as it fell in front of him. Seven, five, eight, and six of hearts. The fifth card seemed to intrigue him greatly; with it he would get the measure of a dexterous player's real mentality; and he hoped desperately that he would not have to play a pat hand. He sighed, picked up the card, and saw the jack of clubs. For a moment he regarded the dealer thoughtfully, and almost affectionately, and then he swiftly made up his mind. He would risk one play for the sake of knowledge. He opened for a white chip.

Hawes saw, and raised a red. Bradley

stayed. Hopalong dropped out. The house player saw, and raised a blue, a true mark of confidence in a stranger's dealing ability; and almost before the chips had struck the table, Hawes saw and raised the limit. Bradley stayed, and the house player, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, evened it up, and asked for one card. He looked at it and turned it over, face up on the table. It was the four of hearts.

"Thanks," he said, nodding to Hopalong. "I needed that. It costs fifty dollars to play with me," he said to the others.

Hawes thought swiftly. As a heart, the cards would fill a flush; as a four spot, it would build up three of a kind, a straight, a fullhouse or four of a kind. Had it been a jack he would have hesitated; but now he tried to hide his elation, and tossed in a hundred dollars to see and to raise. Bradley sighed and dropped out.

"You took two cards," murmured the house player thoughtfully. "Mebby—mebby you got another; but I doubt it. She's up ag'in."

"Once more," said Hawes, his eyes glinting.

"Well, it's my business to know a bluff when I see one," said the house player, studying his adversary. "It's my best judgment that you . . . Well, anyhow, I'll back it, Hawes, an' boost her once more."

"Gracias!" laughed Hawes, a little tensely. "When I went to school a four spot was a right small card. See you, an' raise ag'in."

"An' once more."

"Ag'in."

"Once more."

"Ag'in."

"An' once more," said the house player. "I allus like to play a hand like this clean to the end. They're right scarce."

SUDDENLY Hawes had a disturbing suspicion. Could it be that his opponent had held four of a kind pat? He, himself, had thrown away an ace and a queen. That left two possible high fours; kings or jacks. He looked at his own cards, and decided that he had pressed them for all they were worth.

"Then show it to me!" he growled, calling.

"It's the gambler's prayer," said the house player, laying down his cards slowly and one by one. The five of hearts joined the face-up four; then the six, and then the seven. He looked calmly over the top of the last card, holding it close to his face; and then, sighing, placed it where it belonged, and dropped both hands under the edge of the table.

"Straight flush," he said calmly.

Hawes flushed and then went pale. Both of his hands were on the table, while the house player's were out of sight. He swore in his throat and started to toss his cards into the discard, but the house player checked him.

"It's a showdown, Hawes. I paid as much to see your hand as you paid to see mine. Turn 'em over."

Hawes obeyed, slamming the cards viciously, and four pleasant ten-spots lay in orderly array.

"Hard luck for a man to git a hand like that at the wrong time," said the winner.

He drew in the chips and picked up the cards. A thought passed through his mind; when playing with keen, smart men, a foolish play will often win. In such a case, two successive bluffs often pay dividends. The house player chuckled in his throat.

"Jacks to open this one," the house player—it was his deal—announced as Hopalong cut. It pleased him to see the way in which Hopalong followed the natural way to cut the deck, and lifted it by the sides; but it only showed confidence, because the dealer wanted no cut at all, and switched it perfectly as he took it up again. In what he was about to do, he would accomplish two things; he would return a favor, and also help Hawes into the situation the latter had been looking

for. To make plain his own innocence in the matter, he talked while he dealt.

"The art of cuttin' cards is a fine one," he said. "You hear a lot about slick dealin', but hardly a word about slick cuttin'. That's because it's mighty rare. Why, once I knowed a feller that could cut. . . . Oh, well, I'll tell that story after the hand is played."

But it so happened that the house player never told that lie.

Hawes passed. Bradley opened for ten. Hopalong stayed, and the dealer dropped out. Hawes raised it five, and Bradley tossed in a blue and a white chip, seeing, and raising the limit. Hopalong leveled up and added another blue. Hawes dropped out. Bradley studied his hand and saw. He drew two cards and Hopalong took one. The latter would have been very much surprised if he had been disappointed, for he had detected the switched cut. Bradley pushed out a blue chip, and Hopalong saw and raised another. Bradley pushed in two, and Hopalong two more. Back and forth it went, time after time.

Hawes leaned over and looked at Bradley's hand. He studied Hopalong a moment, and gave thought to the straight flush he had just had the misfortune to call. Straight flushes do not come two in a row—at least, that was so in his experience. He leaned forward, his left hand resting on his piled chips.

"Side bet, Riordan?" he inquired sneeringly.

"How much?" asked Hopalong, a little nervously.

"How much you got?" snapped Hawes.

"Plenty."

"Huh! Dollars, or cents?" sneered Hawes, quoting an unpleasant phrase.

"Dollars. Lemme see. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, forty, forty-one, two, three, four, five, six—forty-six hundred, leavin' me ham an' aig money. You scared?"

Scared hell!" snapped Hawes. He counted his own resources, found them greatly short, and looked inquiringly at Bradley. "Lend me the difference?" he asked.

Bradley nodded, and beckoned to the head bartender.

"Give Hawes what he needs, an' put a memo in the safe," he ordered.

IN A FEW moments the game went on, the side bets lying apart from the pot. Then Bradley, grinning triumphantly, raised the limit again, certain that Riordan did not have money enough left to meet it. It was a sucker trick, but sometimes it worked.

Hopalong looked at him curiously, hesitated, went through his pockets, and then turned a worried face to his adversary.

"Anybody in the room lend me fifty dollars? he asked, loudly; and not a voice replied. Hawes' malignant gaze had swept the crowd and held it silent. Not a man dared to comply with the request.

"Is that the way you win yore pots. Bradley? asked Hopalong coldly.

"I've raised you. Call or quit."

Hopalong's right hand dug down into a pocket, and he laughed nastily as he dropped a fifty dollar bill on top of the chips in the center of the table.

"What you got, tin-horn?" he asked.

"I got the gambler's second prayer, chuckled Bradley, exposing four aces, and reaching for the pot.

"But I got the first," grunted Hopalong.

"Same little run of hearts that we saw before."

For a moment there was an utter silence, and then came a blurr of speed from Hawes, but just the instant before it came, Bradley fell off his chair to the left, his own left arm falling across Hopalong's right forearm, blocking a draw; but the other men had discovered, when too late, that Hopalong's left hand was the better of the two. The double roar seemed to bend the walls, and sent the lamp flames leaping, to flicker almost to extinction. One

went out, the other two recovered. The smoke thinned to show Hawes sliding from his chair, and Bradley on the floor, where he had fallen by his own choice, with both hands straining at the Mexican spur which spiked his cheek.

The two leveled Colts held the crowd frozen in curious postures. Hands were raised high, or held out well away from belts. Hopalong backed to the wall, his left hand gun still smoking. He felt the wall press against him, and then he nodded swiftly to the house player.

"You had a hell of a lot to say about the cut, after you switched it! Now let's see what you know about a draw!" As Hopalong spoke, he shoved both guns into their sheaths, and slowly crossed his arms.

The gambler made no move, scarcely daring to breathe. He still doubted his senses.

"All right, then. Get out, an' stay out!" ordered Hopalong, and as the house player passed through the door, another man came in; a man unsteady on his feet, and covered with sweat and dust and blood.

The newcomer leaned against the bar for a moment, his gaze searching the room; and as he saw his old friend, Hopalong Cassidy, his old friend recognized him. It was Johnny Nelson.

"Hoppy!" he called joyously.

"Johnny! What's up?"

"They rushed us in the dark, an' shot all of us up. Not seriously, but we're out of action. They got every head—near two hundred!"

Johnny Nelson's gaze wavered, rested for an instant on the open window to one side of his friend, and across the room from him and vague and unsteady as he was, he yielded to the gunman's instinct. His right hand dropped, and twisted up like a flash to the top of the holster, and the crash of his shot became a scream in the night outside the open window. George had lost his hundred-dollar fee—and with it, his life.

"Pullin' down on you, from the dark, Hoppy; but I got the skunk," muttered Johnny. He leaned against the bar again and took the whiskey which an ingratiating bartender placed under his nose. "They got 'em all, Hoppy—two hundred head."

Hopalong had his back to the wall again.

"Good kid!" he called. "I just made a trade with the fellers that stole your cattle. They can keep the steers, and we'll keep the poker winnin's I made by outcheating them two cheaters. Two hundred head at near thirty dollars apiece, kid—which gives you a bigger profit, an' saves you twelve hundred miles of trailin'. Watch the room, kid." He raised his hand. "Bartender, cash in them chips at five, ten an' fifty. Pronto!"

It did not take long to turn the counters into money, and Hopalong, backing past the table and toward his capable friend, picked up his winnings, jammed them into a pocket, and slowly reached the stair door.

"It's a tight corner, kid," said Hopalong crisply. "But yo're in no shape to ride. Up them stairs, in front of me." He stepped aside for his friend to pass, and then he stepped back again, his foot feeling for the first tread. His gaze flicked about the room, and he smiled thinly.

"My name's Cassidy," he said, and the smile now twisted his hard face. "My friends call me Hopalong. When I go to bed, I go to sleep. Any objections?"

The spellbound silence was broken by murmurs of surprise. Several faces showed quick friendliness, and a man in a far corner slowly got to his feet.

"An old friend of your'n is a right good friend of mine, Cassidy," he said, glancing slowly and significantly around the room. "Anybody that can't wait for daylight will taste my lead. Good-night, you old hoss-thief!"

"Good-night, friend," said Hopalong. The door slowly closed, and the crowd listened to the accented footsteps of a slightly lame, red-haired gentleman who made his unhurried way upward.

The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

1890-1940

Heartiest congratulations on your fiftieth birthday! You are a remarkable magazine. Most publications have begun to wither at your venerable age, but there certainly is no sign of faltering in you. Your step is firmer, your voice is stronger, your red blood flows more vigorously today than it did that week nearly twenty years ago when you bought one of my first stories.

I shall always be grateful to you for your encouragement, for the way you slapped down my efforts which deserved to be slapped down, and I hope that you and I continue for a long time to work together.

Karl Detzer.

Hopalong Cassidy and the others join me in hearty congratulations to SHORT STORIES Magazine on its fiftieth anniversary, and hope its health and growth continues and that it keeps to the high standard it always has maintained.

Clarence E. Mulford.

I have learned that it is not by chance that SHORT STORIES yarns are the best. Back of every tale in your pages lies an unavoidable triangle of fact: the knowledge of the author in his scene, his painstaking effort to produce a story that is tops, and your careful editorial scrutiny as to balance, color and flavor. And I have learned, also, that the pages of SHORT STORIES are jealously guarded because of the discrimination of your readers. And most important of all, I have learned that acceptance of a story does not let down the bars for all that an author writes.

It's pretty hard on us writers, this business of your being so hard to please. But it will insure SHORT STORIES of at least another fifty years of fiction leadership.

Eaton K. Goldthwaite.

That SHORT STORIES is fifty years old is not surprising to me, for I grew up with it and the magazine was robust and mature when I first made its acquaintance, more than twenty years ago.

I thrilled to the stories in SHORT STORIES when I was a boy. And I said to myself: I want to write stories like these some day and I hope, yes, I hope they'll be published in SHORT STORIES.

Well, that came to pass, but the thing that still surprises me is that authors whose names appeared in SHORT STORIES so many years ago, are still appearing in its pages, along with my own. I remember distinctly, H. Bedford-Jones, W. C. Tuttle, Captain Frederick Moore, James B. Hendryx, L. Patrick Greene.

And I remember other names that appeared in SHORT STORIES through the years and although no longer appearing, have made their mark in literary fame. There was Ernest Haycox—a grand writer—Talbot Mundy, Harold Lamb, Alan LeMay and others.

I am not unselfish in wishing SHORT STORIES another fifty years of robust life, for I hope during many of those years to be still writing for it.

Frank Gruber.

Back in 1918 I was assaulting the citadels of fiction and being hurled back torn and bleeding. One afternoon I picked up a copy of SHORT STORIES and read a short sea story. I finished and said, "By golly I believe I might do something like that. Maybe I've been doing the wrong kind of stories." So I rolled up my sleeves and went to work. *A Yankee Trick* was the result. I sent it, and in due time a letter of acceptance came. I went around in a daze, running into people, knocking down fir trees. My bride had to throw water in my face to snap me out of it. I was an author at last. Since then I've sold over a thousand yarns, running from 1,000 to 75,000 words, and I'm beginning to wonder if I'll ever be an author. But I do hope when you celebrate SHORT STORIES' seventy-fifth anniversary you'll need something from my battered mill.

With best wishes and rousing cheers for the magazine, I am,

Frank Richardson Pierce.

So, SHORT STORIES, you are fifty years old! I can't remember all that time back, but my acquaintance with you covers twenty-five years at least. It was in 1912 that I met you first. It was in a Hudson's Bay Post on the north end of Reindeer Lake—which is well up in northern Saskatchewan, which is nowadays a four-hour flight from here but was in those days a good two weeks' of travel. You were on a table in the Post, and as I was windbound there, you helped me put in a lot of waiting.

Later, that acquaintanceship ripened. My assistant at a Revillon Post on the Churchill took you regularly. And if your face, with the big red beauty-spot on it, didn't show up on each monthly mail, "Dundee" raised an awful squawk. During that time, a lot of the old hands have dropped from your pages. Some have taken the trail where the moccasins all point one way; others have merely gone missing. It seems to me, however, that Jim Hendryx and Fred Moore were doing their stuff for you then, and by the gait they're swinging, they'll be doing it for some years to come.

So we hope that when your next fiftieth anniversary comes around—although a lot of us old-timers won't be here to join in the celebration—the next generation may find you still leading the parade.

H. S. M. Kemp.

It was during the great dollars-and-sense crisis that we made our new Friend. Every day since that first contact in late 1932, our Friend has entered our minds, yet only once have we met him face on.

Now we learn that he has been here half a century which is much longer than most of his kind live. Born before the Gay Nineties, swept into the Twentieth Century, he has survived the World War and the devastating Depression. When myriad others blinked out, he changed sponsors, hung to his text—and his glamorous apparel—to come through as lusty as ever. At this half century mark, indeed, he is better than ever. Do you wonder, then, that we admire him?

So we say, "Congratulations, Friend. May you long outlive us all!"

Our Friend, of course, is SHORT STORIES Magazine.

Berton E. Cook.

One of the letters I still treasure is one from Harry Peyton Steger, dated September, 1909, in which Mr. Steger, as editor of SHORT STORIES, accepted my first short story entitled: *Mary Jane's Diversion.* Since that time I have written quite a few things for the magazine, and have had an amazingly delightful business association with all of the editors who have succeeded Mr. Steger. Of course the magazine has improved since that time, but its editorial policy toward its writers and its public has not appreciably changed. You print the same clean, virile fiction, you hold fast to your ideals. The effect is that of a fresh, wholesome breath sweeping through, and

permeating, a field which is just now decadent with maudlin realism. You have created an institution, and I am honored to have helped to contribute something toward founding it.

Some of these days, with your permission, I shall do another for SHORT STORIES, just to get the feel of the old days.

Charles Alden Seltzer.

I'm glad to be aboard with SHORT STORIES. And when I think back over the many books I've been with—books that are no more—I decide that this fiftieth anniversary of SHORT STORIES knocks the props out from under that old chestnut that says "the good die young." Not by a danged sight, readers. The good live—when you're talking about magazines.

So, with best wishes for the next fifty, I remain,

Andrew A. Caffrey.

I was not one of the first contributors to SHORT STORIES, but I first slipped into the magazine in, I believe, 1918. I know something about the problems of editing a magazine. They are multitudinous and difficult. Whether the editors or the writers have the most to do with keeping a magazine alive and lively suggests an argument that doesn't seem likely to make anybody very happy; but my personal opinion is that the editor deserves the larger credit. Writers write to please the editor. The editor's job is to direct and select such stories as please the readers. The editors of SHORT STORIES have done that for fifty years; which brings me to what I think the readers ought to know: For the past twenty years SHORT STORIES has had but two editors—and the present editor was associate for a good deal of that time. I should like to say more about this same present editor but I know the size of the blue pencil that guards SHORT STORIES' pages.

Gordon Young.

Ten or twelve years ago S. S. McClure, who about the beginning of the century was publishing a magazine so good that other editors had to keep on their toes to stay in the running, told me that the best fiction of this country was being published in the adventure field and that SHORT STORIES was tops among the periodicals running tales of that type.

This pleased me, because for a long time I had been of that opinion. When you read a copy of SHORT STORIES you find it packed with adventures in life, even though all the tales may not be what is usually called action fiction. They are vital, close to reality. The characters in them live. The atmosphere is genuine. If the writer is showing us a scene from the high plains you

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY
1890 1940
FATHER TIME TURNS TO PAGE FIFTY OF SHORT STORIES. IT HAS BEEN GOOD READING FROM ITS BEGINNING.
MAY ITS FUTURE BE FULL OF GOOD LUCK
OREN R. WAGGENER

feel the bite of the wind and the taste of the dusty sunkissed trail. If it is Australia, you see the scrub bush and the flaunting glory of the waratah, and you hear from the eucalyptus the discords of the laughing jackass lifted to the sky. The talk is crisp and vivid. The story marches.

The editors of SHORT STORIES have always had an amazing gift for knowing good stuff when it reaches their desks. Year in, year out, they have kept to a high level without a let-down.

Here's wishing SHORT STORIES a happy birthday, with the hope that the next fifty years may be even better than the first.

William MacLeod Raine.

Fiftieth anniversary! I had no idea that SHORT STORIES had been going that long. Anyway, congratulations and all that sort of thing, and here is my earnest wish that it may continue for fifty more—and then some more.

Unless memory serves me wrong, I sold my first story to SHORT STORIES in 1919. Twenty long years ago. A lot of water has gone over the dam since then. I cannot remember the title of that first story, but I can say that it was followed by many, many more, and that no magazine on earth could have treated a writer better than SHORT STORIES have treated me during those twenty years.

It was a big magazine when I first appeared in its pages, and it is a big magazine now. Nothing ever seemed to cause the SHORT STORIES to lessen or cheapen its format and contents. Writers grew up with SHORT STORIES, and the magazine's policy of square-dealing with writers has kept the best of them as contributors.

I created Cultus Collins, Sad Sontag, Swede Harrigan and many other characters especially for SHORT STORIES, and now they have Hashknife and Sleepy to add to the list. For good, diversified action stories, written by men and women who know what they are writing about, give me SHORT STORIES. It has never been edited by a one-track mind, which assures the reader of all kinds of tales, rather than a "type" of story.

What other magazine has ever had a Golden Anniversary? Perhaps I am too young to know. But I feel that it is a mark of distinction to have written for twenty years or more for a magazine that has endured for fifty. I can look at that golden cover—and still feel young.

Tut.

So SHORT STORIES is fifty years old! It seems that we came into the world together. We didn't get acquainted at once; but it is a fact, that for a good part of those fifty years, SHORT STORIES has been publishing my yarns. So when the birthday cake is being cut, I want a piece of it—and I know it will be only a matter of time when you'll be celebrating your one hundredth anniversary.

Harry Sinclair Drago.

The news that SHORT STORIES is this year celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, saddens me to the point of tears. First, because I am three years older than the magazine, which means I shan't see its one hundredth anniversary. Second, because I had supposed myself one of its oldest contributors — and there must be many older than I on that list. Yes, SHORT STORIES and H. Bedford-Jones have been keeping company for a hell of a long time and if the association has been mutually happy and profitable, I shall feel flattered.

I believe our association dates from around 1913, at which time I began to edge past the sacred portals with stories at a low rate of pay. That I can be appearing in the same magazine with a serial nearly thirty years later, is something of a record, particularly as the appearances have been sustained through the years. Maybe it just goes to prove how good we both are.

H. Bedford-Jones.

Your anniversary issue reminds me of those eight most pleasant years between 1927 and 1934 when I wrote for SHORT STORIES and had a tremendous amount of fun doing it. All days are golden, yet it is a natural thing for the man animal, with the tick of the clock in his ears, to look behind him with a feeling of nostalgia and to murmur wistfully in his beard: "Those were the days." We were younger then. A strong cup of black coffee and a fresh cigar at midnight were the only things necessary to start Silver Bob and his partner across the desert on fresh adventures. I wonder where they're riding now. But as for the black coffee and the fresh cigar—not at midnight any more.

Fifty years is a long time in the magazine business, particularly in the field of the action and adventure magazine. They come, make their bow, flourish and depart. Lately the parade across the stage has been rather rapid from entrance to exit and for some magazines the bow of introduction has served also as farewell. Changing times, changing tastes and values have worked their way; for many an old favorite the best we can say is, "I remember when."

That SHORT STORIES still prospers is a tribute to an editorial policy consistently vital, never narrow. Somehow you have always known the truth about your readers, their keen appetite for the fresh and robust chronicle of a full man plowing through whatever environment surrounding him in search of some destiny he felt belonged to him. It is the oldest of hungers, undiminished by the gadgets and air-conditioned units of our civilization. For satisfaction of this hunger men march to the

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6.00-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.40
6.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x6.50-18	3.35	1.40
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ends of the earth, crack their ribs on the football field, try for the highest of peaks, encase themselves in iron walls to plumb the ocean depths. It is that real. Some of the sophisticated laddies like to laugh at this; but between laughter you'll find them swishing a fly rod in the front room and wondering if they can make the left fork of Murderers' Creek by daylight. Same thing. Nothing is more real.

When you make your anniversary appearance there will be behind you in spirit those writers who have shared the fun through the years. That fellow third from the end in the last row—the one now turning both gray and bald—has a faintly familiar look. I have seen him before.

May you have another equally distinguished fifty years.

Ernest Haycox.

Fifty years is a mighty long time when it represents the age of a man, a mule, or a magazine. However, I don't give a man any special credit for reaching that mark and if a mule ever tells me he's fifty I'll call him a liar, but I *do* take my hat off to the magazine that has lived for half a century and is still growing.

SHORT STORIES, congratulations!

Lately you've been putting on weight and bowing your neck and prancing right smart, and a man can't blame you for cutting capers thataway. You ought to think pretty well of yourself, for you have come a long ways through bad weather and rough country, leaving behind you a trail marked by durable friendships—millions of readers whom you have enlightened and entertained, and no telling how many grateful authors—many of whom got their start in your pages, all of whom are indebted to you for your patience and considerate treatment.

A long time back you bought my first story.

Here's hoping that you're alive and kicking and getting your growth when I write my last one, and that you buy the dadblamed thing!

Caddo Cameron.

At this time I am glad to write SHORT STORIES to enclose a check for $8.00 for a two years subscription and to offer my congratulations on your 50th birthday. For your information I have been reading SHORT STORIES for just about that fifty years—ever since the Union News Company sold it on the trains out of Philadelphia, and that goes back a long way.

C. H. Reade.

Cush sent you folks a letter about your fiftieth anniversary, and he tells me you used it one number ahead of time; I can't let him get ahead of me unless it is in the matter of wives, so I am using this new air mail to get you this letter for the big issue itself. All the other John Smiths on Halfaday join me in wishing you many happy returns of every one who reads SHORT STORIES.

Black John Smith,
per Jim Hendryx.

And finally a letter from Harry E. Maule who edited SHORT STORIES for so many successful years:

So the old SS is having its half century anniversary. Quite a while for an outfit to operate under the same brand and with an ever-expanding range. Lots of new brands have appeared and many have dropped out in that time. Some, at one time or another worked over a pretty big territory and some gave the SS outfit a tough run. But here's the old SS still shipping twice a month and always going forward. Yessir, there aren't many can show the record of SS. In fact, show me *one*. Perhaps it's natural for me to be a little boastful, having edited SHORT STORIES for so many years, but on the other hand, I'm not riding herd on any magazine nowadays and can be entirely impartial. When SHORT STORIES was my job I only *thought* it the best magazine in the field. Today, looking at it from another angle of publishing, I *know* it is. And as its old top-hand and range-boss, I ought to know.

Harry E. Maule.

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Send Free Catalog in colors showing late model standard Typewriters at tremendous savings with no money down and 10 days' trial.
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60 Days' Trial! $6.85 to $35
We make FALSE TEETH for you by MAIL from your own mouth-impression. Money-Back Guarantee of Satisfaction.
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For quick relief from itching of eczema, pimples, athlete's foot, scales, scabies, rashes and other externally caused skin troubles, use world-famous, cooling, antiseptic, liquid D. D. D. Prescription. Greaseless, stainless. Soothes irritation and quickly stops the most intense itching. 35c trial bottle proves it, or money back. Ask your druggist today for D. D. D. PRESCRIPTION.

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Name.....
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In our next issue

SHORT STORIES

for

APRIL 10th

★

FRANK GRUBER
An Outlaw Story

★

WALTER C. BROWN
A One-Man War in China

★

GORDON KEYNE
A South Seas Yarn

★

J. CABRERA DE MOYA
A Foreign Legion Novelette

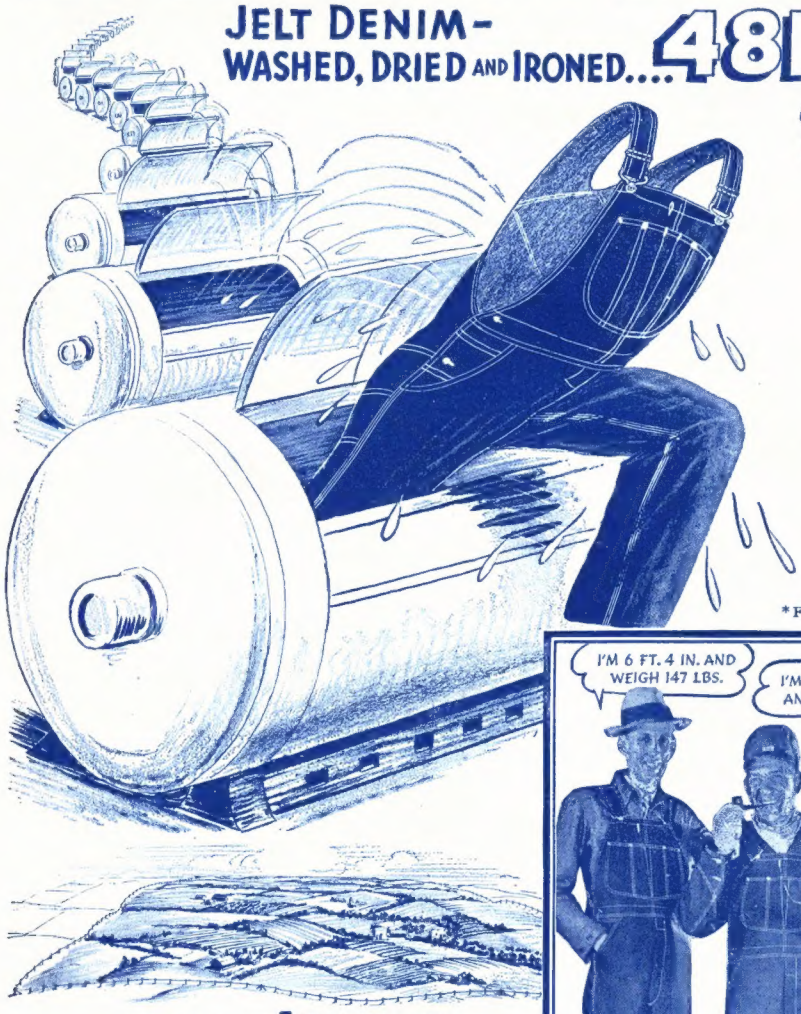
★

G. A. SHAFTEL
A Tale of Santa Fe

Believe It or Not! by Ripley

JELT DENIM— WASHED, DRIED AND IRONED....481 TIMES!

(THE EQUIVALENT OF 9 YEARS OF WEEKLY WASHING!)



THIS WORLD'S RECORD JELT DENIM WASHING *PROVES* THAT NO MATTER HOW OFTEN YOUR SANFORIZED,* TAILOR SIZED **Lee OVERALLS** ARE WASHED—NO MATTER HOW LONG THEY LAST—*THEY'LL ALWAYS GIVE YOU PERFECT FIT AND COMFORT!*

*Fabric shrinkage less than 1%.

THE YARN FROM *ONE* **Lee** OVERALL WOULD FENCE IN **2000** ACRES OF LAND!
OVER 10 FEET OF YARN—TIGHTLY WOVEN INTO EACH SQUARE INCH OF FABRIC, GIVES JELT DENIM, USED EXCLUSIVELY IN **Lee** OVERALLS, ITS FAMOUS EXTRA WEARING STRENGTH!

"YET OUR LEE TAILORED SIZED OVERALLS GIVE US ALL PERFECT FIT!" You'll get a thrill when you slip into your first pair of Lee Overalls! No matter what your size or build, you'll discover an amazing "tailored" fit—perfect *for you* in waist, leg length, crotch and bib height! Try one on at your Lee dealer's this week—and see for yourself what perfect work comfort is really like!

RIPLEY'S EXPLANATION. *Washed 481 Times:* The American Institute of Laundering, Joliet, Illinois, world's largest laundry laboratory, washed, dried and ironed Lee Jelt Denim continuously over a period of nine months. Yet the amazing wearing strength of this sturdy Jelt Denim, used exclusively in Lee Overalls, held good through 481 of these laundering operations - the equivalent of 9 years of weekly washing! This gruelling demonstration PROVED that no matter how often your Lee Overalls are washed—no matter how long they last—they'll ALWAYS give you perfect fit and comfort!

Lee Overalls are guaranteed to look better, fit better, last longer—or Lee gives you your money back, or a new pair FREE!—Believe-It-Or-Not!

Copr. 1940

UNION-MADE **Lee** JELT DENIM OVERALLS SANFORIZED SHRUNK*

THE H. D. LEE MERC. COMPANY

Kansas City, Mo. Trenton, N. J. So. Bend, Ind.
San Francisco, Calif. Minneapolis, Minn. Salina, Kans. W4002A

DAUGHTER, AGED 18

MOTHER, AGED 40

FATHER, AGED 43

GRANDFATHER, 72

SON, AGED 9

BABY, 6 MONTHS

ONE LIFE INSURANCE POLICY INSURES THEM ALL!

GROUP LIFE INSURANCE PROTECTS YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY

Men, Women, Children—Ages 1-75

TOTAL GUARANTEED COST *Only*

$1.00

A MONTH

Loving sympathy and friendly consolation is not enough when death breaks up your family circle. You'll need ready cash to meet the burden of expenses that accompany such grief. Life insurance will see you through the unbearable days with cash.

Unless every member of your family is insured, sooner or later, you are bound to come face to face with the financial burdens that follow the footsteps of death.

Until this new Family Group Life Insurance Policy was created, life insurance on the entire family was so costly that only the wealthier families could carry it.

But now, thanks to the sound ideas of our actuaries, we found that if all members of the family were insured in one policy, we could save on policy costs, bookkeeping costs, mail, stamps, and other items. Then we decided that we could further save by hiring no agents who often get 50% or more of the premiums . . . we decided, too, that we would hire no collectors—pay no medical examination fees, and other frills . . . so that we could for only $1.00 a month give the whole family safe, reliable legal reserve insurance, paying benefits for death from any cause . . . and regardless of which member of the family died.

Don't confuse this old reliable company, issuing legal reserve insurance, with other less accepted types of benefits and contracts. This is genuine life insurance based on an actuarially sound group plan.

READ THESE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. How many members of the Family can be covered by one policy?
A. There is no limit—all there are in the family.

Q. Is the Bankers Life and Casualty Company supervised by the Insurance Commission of the State of Illinois?
A. Yes, the policy has been approved by the Insurance Department and the Company's operations are under constant supervision of the State Government.

Q. Who can be included in the family group?
A. Husband and/or wife, their parents, their children, either adopted or natural. (3 generations.)—ALL FOR $1.00 A MONTH.

Q. Is a medical examination required?
A. No.

Q. Will a collector come around to get the payments?
A. No. The cost of collection by collectors would make it necessary to reduce benefits. Special cards and envelopes are supplied to policyholders for mailing payments.

Q. How long does the company take to pay their claims?
A. Within 24 hours after approval of the claim.

Q. Must all persons included in the policy be living in the immediate household of the applicant?
A. No.

IF ANY ONE IN YOUR FAMILY DIES FROM ANY CAUSE WE PAY BENEFITS UP TO $3000 AS SHOWN IN THE POLICY

The Family Group Policy insures your entire family for a maximum of . . . .

$1,000 in event of ordinary or natural death as clearly explained in the policy; a maximum of.

$2,000 in event of death by auto as shown in the policy; a maximum of

$3,000 in event of travel death as outlined in this marvelous Family Group Policy.

ACT NOW · SEND COUPON!

PLEASE, SEND NO MONEY—

This policy is so outstanding and liberal that once you examine it, you will marvel at it. Without cost to you we will send complete details and tell you how to get the Family Group.

NO AGENT WILL CALL

Decide for yourself in the privacy of your own home whether this policy isn't the biggest insurance offer ever made by a dependable, reliable, life insurance company.

ACT NOW— AND RETURN COUPON AT ONCE

BANKERS LIFE AND CASUALTY CO.,
Bankers Insurance Bldg., Jefferson Sta., Desk 191
Chicago, Illinois.

☐ Please send details and tell me how to get the Family Group Policy for Free Inspection.

Name.....

Street or R.F.D.....

City..... State.....